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THE SHORT FICTION OF WYNDHAM LEWIS: THE MACHINE AND THE ROT

by

JAYANTI NEGI

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE SHORT FICTION OF WYNDHAM LEWIS: THE MACHINE AND THE ROT submitted by Jayanti Negi in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date April 18, 1975

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ABSTRACT

The importance of the short story in the Lewisian canon cannot be overstressed. Lewis began writing short stories during the 1900's and returned to them time and again till the end of his career. They act as sketches to his novels.

The first chapter in this thesis functions as an introduction. It attempts to pin down the major characteristics in Lewis's short fiction. It is in his early stories that Lewis first sees man's body as machine, separate from and yet attached to the mind. In other words, Lewis postulates a body/mind dichotomy that is used as an instrumental concept to satirize man. The method used for this process is external, that is, the description is of external details which uses a great deal of machine imagery to emphasize the mechanical character of man. Lewis's theory of laughter is that it is provoked from the observation of man whose body is really a thing, behaving like a person. The men-machines in the stories illustrate this point and are used as targets of satire, particularly in The Wild Body. The stories in Rotting Hill are a commentary on post-World War II England. Apart from the fact that man is seen as machine here too, an organic element, representing rot enters in him. The rot is symbolic of the spiritual, social and economic decay in England at the time and by extension the entire western civilization.

The first chapter also deals peripherally with Unlucky for Pringle, a collection of Lewis's stories anthologized recently.

The second chapter is on The Wild Body stories which begins by focussing on the persona Ker Orr as a machine and shows how he is so manipulated by the author that he is like a mechanical toy himself. He moves and observes characters in the stories as machines according to a programmed pattern except that he claims to be able to operate his machine-body himself. The body-mind dichotomy is seen in the stories by means of an external description emphasizing the mindless, machine-like nature of the body of man through the use of a vivid machine metaphor which directs the form as well as the content of the stories. The machine metaphor is a provocative device. It dwells on the surface and shows up man as a mere puppet with great satiric force. The body/mind dichotomy extends itself to the artist/public dichotomy in one of the stories, this too is examined in Chapter II. This chapter also analyzes the Lewisian laughter in the stories in which laughter is often a substitute for violence. The relationship of violence and laughter is explored.

The third chapter deals with the stories in Rotting Hill. It is primarily concerned with the powerful metaphor of rot which pervades the stories and the possible connection between the metaphors of the machine and the rot.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE SHORT FICTION OF WYNDHAM LEWIS

Introduction

It is gratifying to note that serious attention is being paid to Wyndham Lewis's short stories. C.J. Fox and Robert T. Chapman have brought together his stories either unpublished or published only in magazines. Two exceptions are: "A Spanish Household", which was published in The Tramp in 1910 and "The Rebellious Patient" published in the Wyndham Lewis issue of Shenandoah in 1953. Their anthology is entitled Unlucky for Pringle: Unpublished and Other Stories. It contains all the stories that are not included in The Wild Body and Rotting Hill. It is an important collection since Lewis's short stories still have not found their way into modern anthologies of short fiction along with the stories of Joyce, Lawrence, Hemingway and Kafka. It seems to me that such anthologies suffer in consequence since Lewis's stories are as serious and as experimental as any of the works of his contemporaries who are frequently anthologized. It is, however, not my intention to compare Lewis's

work with that of other writers of short fiction. My study and analysis of his short fiction is an attempt to bring into focus the ontology which directs both the form and the content of his short stories--particularly those in The Wild Body and Rotting Hill.

Lewis's stories are highly philosophical investigations into the very nature of man and the universe around him. His short fiction contains in embryo almost all the ideas developed in his subsequent work. To borrow a metaphor from painting, his stories are to his novels what sketches are to canvasses. The stories also demonstrate the highly energetic and original manipulation of language which won praise from men like Pound and Eliot.[1] Hugh Kenner too has commented on what he calls Lewis's "unique vorticist prose",[2] a prose also admired by E.W.F. Tomlin who wrote, "On the purely verbal plane, each sentence is his and not somebody else's. There is a Lewis punch and tourneure of phrase which no one has come near imitating".[3] Critics however are now beginning to analyze the unique linguistic structure of Lewis's prose. For instance in a recent article called "Wyndham Lewis as Futurist" Fredric Jameson submits Lewis's prose to structural analysis. At the beginning of his article he observes, "To face the sentences of Wyndham Lewis is to find oneself in the presence of immense mechanical energy",[4] and again towards the conclusion of his article he speaks of Lewis's language as a prose which is

"full of a mechanic's enthusiasm".[5] This particular quality of Lewis's prose, Jameson connects with what he identifies as Lewis's initial attitude to the machine. For Lewis, he says, "there can be no question of opposing nature or the organic to the machine." He then quotes from The Caliph's Design to support his point:

> Every living form is a miraculous mechanism..., and every sanguinary, vicious and twisted need produces in Nature's workshop a series of mechanical arrangements extremely suggestive and interesting for the engineer, and almost invariably beautiful or interesting for the artist.[6]

Although the short story is only one of the forms Lewis uses as a writer, it is very important to him; he returns to it time and again. Also it holds a clue to his long fiction since man is seen as machine for the first time in Lewis's fiction in the short story. In nearly all his novels man appears as a mechanical animal who laughs or is laughed at. Lewis refers frequently to men in his novels as apes, bobbins, cretins, shells, just as he does in his early short stories. Lewis's first literary work was a short story called "The Pole" which was published by Ford Madox Ford in The English Review in May 1909. He was a young man then as he recalls in Rude Assignment:

> My literary career began in France, in the sense that my first published writings originated in notes made in Brittany. Indeed, this period in retrospect, responsible for much, is a blank with regard to painting. There was for instance the beginning of my interest in philosophy (attendance at Bergson's lectures at the College de France one evidence of that). But what I started to do in Brittany I have been developing ever since. Out of Bestre and Brotcotnaz grew, in that sense--if in no other--the aged gossip star at her toilet and Percy Hardcaster classifiable I suppose as satire,

fruits of much visceral and intellectual travail and indolent brooding, a number of pieces eventually collected under the title of "The Wild Body".[7]

This passage brings me directly to the stories in The Wild Body. The work is notable for the unity of form and theme provided to the first seven stories by use of a central persona, Ker-Orr. One does not often find a logical pattern behind a group of stories except in rare cases like Joyce's Dubliners but there is in Lewis's stories as in all his work an emphasis on total pattern. The pattern in The Wild Body incorporates both the machine and the animal metaphor. The mechanical metaphor comes into play for the first time in this collection, although Lewis has used it in his drawings and paintings before. Despite the fact that for the past hundred years or more science has tended to regard man as a machine--in fact J.O. de la Mettrie wrote a book called L'Homme machine in 1748, in which he identified even the psychical activities of the mind as mere mechanical functions of the brain[8]--the creative mind has not been able to accept wholly the mechanical metaphor; for indeed, there is something beyond the machine.

Lewis in these stories has used the mechanical metaphor in the most unusual way. He sees the fusion of the mechanical and the animal in man. The friction which occurs during the process of fusion sparks off the mind. The physical expression of this mind as Lewis sees it, is laughter: "it [laughter] is all that remains physical in the

flash of thought, its friction: or it may be a defiance flung at the hurrying fates."[9] These are Lewis' words from the brilliant essay "Inferior Religions" which he includes in The Wild Body along with an equally brilliant expository essay called "The Meaning of the Wild Body". In these essays Lewis postulates a dichotomy of mind and body which is illustrated by the stories. The tone of these stories is comico-satirical. Not only do they illustrate Lewis's particular human equation, that is man seen as two activities: the machine-body and the mind, or the physical and mental, but also illustrate the philosophical theory of laughter defined in the two essays. The laughter in these stories is not bitter as it often is in his later satiric fiction. Lewis does not particularly like the bitter laughter of the satirist but he suggests in an essay entitled "Studies in the Art of Laughter" that "it is no more humanly repellent than the weeping and gnashing of the teeth...inseparable from the activities of the tragic muse".[10] His solution for taking the bitterness out of laughter is contained in the proposition that "everyone should be laughed at or no one."[11] This brief statement is the most important clue to any understanding of The Wild Body. For all of us have bodies that are animal, all of us do things daily that are automatic and repetitive like machines; therefore we are all absurd. What makes us human is the recognition of the fundamental dichotomy of body and mind. The body is an absurd machine. The 'self'

is derived from the Not-self or the natural by the creative force of the intellect--"non-intelligent matter is the abode of an intelligent principle".[12]

Lewis postulates the same dichotomy in his very abstract and very metaphysical play Enemy of the Stars written and published as early as 1914 in Blast--in other words, during the time that the same creative impulse directed the early stories incorporated in The Wild Body. In this play Lewis presents two characters that are the embodiments of two conflicting principles. Hanp is mundane, the non-intelligent matter, an agent or fool of the stars; Arghol is the intelligent principle, the individualist, the enemy of stars. He is the condemned protagonist, the hero of the intelligent principle butchered by Hanp, the servant of the stars:

> ARGHOL: You have killed me--and to excuse yourself--say it is I who have done it--how like you that last action is!
> HANP: It was you! I have done nothing.
> ARGHOL: Because I could not speak your tongue--in your barbarity![13]

This is true. It was Arghol who failed to draft the body into the service of the mind.

An exposition of some of the ideas upon which the play itself is based is found in the appended section called "The Physics of the Not Self" (written and originally published in The Chapbook, 1925, appended to the revised version of Enemy of the Stars in 1932). The Not-self is a sort of intellectual principle which operates from a detached

point of view nearly independent of its transient animal/ mechanical associate. In most men this principle has been stultified by the mechanical. Lewis says in this essay that his intention is to "show the human mind in its traditional role of the enemy of life, as an oddity outside the human machine."[14] He is using the word life to mean crude biological energy. The human mind must come to grips with this energy, otherwise it will perish like Arghol. Lewis seems to say that the mind resists the animal/mechanical; and that it is embarrassed by the fact that it has to depend on and reside in it. Therefore it is essential for the mind to train itself to be observer and master of the body, and thus transcend its limitations. In one of the six imaginary letters which Lewis contributed to The Little Review in 1917, the persona called William Bland Burn writes to his wife Lydia:

> The body does not matter the smallest fraction where the mind is concerned. I can imagine beauty as fluently and fully as if I had the head of an Apollo. The smallness of my eyes does not contract the surging and spreading of my understanding. The twists in a body can only impress themselves on a spirit that dwells constantly therein. I am debarred from nothing in my world...[15]

The point is that the body and the mind are two separate entities and yet one. To live with this paradoxical dichotomy, logically and fruitfully, we must learn to view the body as a machine and laugh at it. It is "in certain forms of laughter", the physical expression of the mind, that "we can leap the chasm lying between non-being over which it is impossible for logic to throw any bridge,..."[16]

The danger is that while we are able to laugh at others and see them as ridiculous, we are not able to see ourselves as such. This danger can multiply itself a millionfold when groups or nations see one another as absurd and inferior but do not see themselves in the same way:

> Again, it is comparatively easy to see that another man, as an animal, is absurd; but it is far more difficult to observe oneself in that hard and exquisite light. But no man has ever continued to live who has observed himself in that manner for longer than a flash. Such consciousness must be in the nature of a thunderbolt. Laughter is only summer lightning. But it occasionally takes on the dangerous form of absolute revelation.
>
> This fundamental self-observation, then, can never on the whole be absolute. We are not constructed to be absolute observers. Where it does not exist at all, men sink to the level of insects.[17]

It is obvious from this passage that Lewis concedes that laughter is not the only response to the human condition and that observation cannot be absolute. Such a position needs no defence.

It is in this "hard exquisite light,"however, that the characters in The Wild Body are seen and from the outside. A detailed examination of this process of seeing and of the body/mind dichotomy as an instrumental concept in satire is the subject matter of Chapter Two.

Satire and Ficiton

The satire in these stories differs from satire in the novel The Apes of God in that the apes satirized in the novel are sophisticated urban ones associated in general with the Bloomsbury Circle; but the characters in The Wild Body stories

are primitives. It was when Lewis looked at his contemporaries in a "hard and exquisite light" that his work first produced a violent reaction. The furore caused by the malice which was read into The Apes of God was countered by a pamphlet edited by Lewis called Satire and Fiction: The History of a Rejected Review by Roy Campbell. The review by Campbell was rejected by the New Statesman whose editor ironically had requested him to write it in the first place. Lewis's defence in the essay "Satire and Fiction" is of importance to this thesis for three reasons: it explains Lewis's position as a satirist; it explains his technique as an artist who observes from the outside; it helps to explain Lewis's position vis-à-vis the Bergsonian philosophy of laughter.

Lewis himself refers to these early stories as satire when he is reviewing the history of his own writing in his autobiography Rude Assignment. In his essay, "Satire and Fiction" he remarks:

> But Satire is in reality often nothing else but the truth, in fact that of Natural Science. That objective, non-emotional truth of the scientific intelligence sometimes takes on the exuberant sensuous quality of creative art: then it is very apt to be called 'satire' for it has been bent not so much upon pleasing as upon being true.[18]

It is clear from this passage that Lewis is committed to telling the reader the "truth" rather than pleasing him. He reiterates this credo time and again:

> That for the artist there are two main orders of truth, that must always be insisted upon. There is (1) the "truth" of Natural Science; and there is (2) the truth of Romance... it

might be said that satire is the truth of the intellect,... It would be absurd to claim that satiric truth (or Scientific truth) was the only truth. But it is equally absurd to say that Truth is beauty and beauty truth.[19]

Again we notice that the position taken by Lewis is reasonable; he admits both truths, he recognizes both sides of the coin. He is aware of the limitations of the satirical mode; but at the same time it is not a matter of mere guessing to say that for himself he prefers narrative satire as a mode of expression. Lewis as an artist and a writer however is not without the capacity of perceiving the truth of romance. The ability to know and distinguish between the two types of truth is a sufficient indication of the fact that the writer is aware of what he is doing in his fiction.

Lewis believes that observation is available to man through his eye; and that it is the outside, the surface that is observable. In this particular mode of observation perhaps he is unrivalled in his description of characters and objects. He uses only external detail in his narratives. As he himself says:

There is nothing of the hot innards of Freud-infected art--no "Fantasies of the Unconscious" about Satire, that you must allow. No it is all constructed out of the dry shells and pelts of things. The surface of the visible machinery of life alone is used...all is metalic--all is external.[20]

The abundance of the mechanical metaphors in his stories illustrate this theory emphatically.

Not only do the machine images appear in his fiction, they dominate his paintings as well; in fact, Vorticism (although the word is Pound's) was conceived and pioneered by

Lewis. It "accepted the machine world that is the point to stress. It sought out machine forms. The pictures of the vorticists were a sort of machine...it was cheerfully and dogmatically external."[21] While I am on the subject of the author's paintings, it will not be out of place to mention that in his symbols and motifs he draws heavily on the animal world too. The simian design on the cover of The Apes of God is worth mentioning, since it is known to most readers of Lewis. The same is true of the short fiction under study. Although the mechanical is more emphatic and powerful the animal imagery runs almost parallel to it. Often used in adroit conjunction, the two metaphors articulate concretely the vivid caricatures of the wild bodies. It is the eye that considers all the physical implications of being human. In general Lewis's eye is keen and powerful, not passive. V.S. Pritchett has attributed Lewis's originality to the painter's faculty of detached observation:

> An eye, promoted in this way to an uncommon, even perverse position of power, becomes inevitably sardonic, expert in false, freakish, intuitive juxtapositions. It is almost certain to be brutally funny; it will sometimes hit upon important general truths.[22]

It is obvious that the critic does not want to give unstinting praise to Lewis; but what these words affirm is Lewis's tremendous capacity for detached observation that enables him to see the body and its action intuitively so that the mind, that inaccessible stage, is revealed. The external approach cannot be sufficiently stressed. As Zagreus says in The Apes

of God,"To be a true satirist, Ratner, you must remain upon the surface of existence."[23] Lewis clung tenaciously to the surface and the result was that he was able to see clearly the body as a machine and the mind as an entity outside it, in some cases operating the body, in others merely letting the machine run in monotonous rhythmical circles. The unique thing is that although he is concerned with metaphysical concepts he reduces these to grotesque realism in his early fiction which he expected the intelligent reader to understand, laugh at and learn from.

Lewis opposed the inside method ruthlessly. He concedes its use in dealing with the aged; the very young; half-wits; animals and spooks. He himself used it sparingly. He proudly accepts Mr. Belgion's remark:

> Everything is told from the outside. To this extent it is the opposite of say, James, who sought to narrate from inside the character's mind. James, in short was a Bergsonian where you [Lewis] are a Berkleyan![24]

This comment brings me to the theory of laughter which lies at the root of the stories in The Wild Body and the theory of laughter in Bergson's essay on "Laughter" based on his lectures which Lewis attended and to which Lewis's theory is often compared. No doubt Lewis was influenced by these lectures; but the influence is not complete, moreover, it is overestimated by critics. Geoffrey Wagner believes that, "Lewis's satiric imagery fully exemplifies Bergson's idea of comic automatism. Nearly all his characters are called machine...."[25] So far, so true. Timothy Materer, while

discussing a character in The Wild Body stories, says:

> The key of course is that he is dressed in his own deluded version of how an affluent American would dress. As in Bergson's theory of laughter, unrealistic pretensions lead to a rigid mechanical approach to life. The reference to the secret...of Valmore's entire machine recalls Bergson's suggestion that "Something mechanical encrusted on the living" is the essence of the ridiculous.[26]

Also true, but it seems to me that Lewis takes Bergson's theory further and in a new direction. This point, I hope, will prove itself from the following quotations. In his essay "Laughter" Bergson writes:

> We have shown that the comic character always errs through obstinacy of mind or of disposition through absentmindedness, in short automatism. At the root of the comic there is a sort of rigidity which compels its victims to keep strictly to one path, to follow it straight along, to shut their ears and refuse to listen.[27]

Elsewhere, in the same essay, he states:

> Here, the living being under discussion was a human being, a person. A mechanical arrangement on the other hand, is a thing. What, therefore, incited laughter, was the momentary transformation of a person into a thing, if one considers the image from this standpoint. Let us then pass from the exact idea of a machine to the vaguer one of a thing in general. We shall have a fresh series of laughable images which will be obtained by taking a blurred impression, so to speak, of the outlines of the former and will bring us to the new law: we laugh everytime a person gives us the impression of being a thing.[28]

Lewis observes:

> The root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a thing behaving like a person. But from that point of view all men are necessarily comic: for they are all things, or physical bodies, behaving as persons. It is only when you come to deny that they are 'persons' or there is any 'mind' or 'person' there at all, that the world of appearance is accepted as quite natural, and not at all ridiculous. Then with a denial of the person life becomes immediately both 'real' and very serious.
>
> To bring vividly to our mind what we mean by 'absurd' let us turn to the plant, and enquire how the plant could be

absurd. Suppose you came upon an orchid or a cabbage reading Flaubert's Salambo...you would be very much surprised. But if you found a man or woman reading it, you would not be surprised.

Now in one sense you ought to be just as much surprised at finding a man occupied in this way as if you had found an orchid or a cabbage, or a tomcat, to include the animal world. There is the same physical anomaly. It is just as absurd externally, that is what I mean.--The deepest root of the comic is to be found in this anomaly.[29]

Please note that while Bergson talks about the comic character only, Lewis applies his theory to all men not just to a few comic specimens. On close analysis we find that while Bergson suggests that laughter is provoked by a person behaving as a thing; Lewis clearly emphasizes that laughter is provoked by a thing behaving as a person. For man in his body is as much a thing as a cabbage. It is only the aware, active nature of the mind that makes the body which really is a thing a person or a human being at all. Lewis is not above describing himself as a thing in an essay which he wrote when because of his blindness he had to discontinue a series of articles he was writing for The Listener. It is a piece entitled "The Sea Mists of Winter". In it he describes how his failing eyesight must have made him look like "the Yonghi-Bonghi-Bo":

I signal small vans, I peer hopefully at baby trucks. At length I get a response. It is a taxi! But I assure you that it is one thing to hail a taxi-cab, another to get into it. This is quite extraordinarily difficult. I try to force my way in beside the indignant driver. He or I will open the door. But as I see everything so indistinctly I attempt to effect a passage through the wood of the door itself, in Alice Through the Looking Glass fashion, rather than take advantage of the gaping hole in the side of the taxi produced by the opening of the door. It is with a sigh of relief that I at last find my way in, after vainly assaulting the

stationary vehicle in two or three places.[30]

There are similarities between Bergson and Lewis, however. For example, Wyndham Lewis shares Bergson's view that automatism and rigidity are part of the comic character; in other words, that mechanical man never departs from the pattern imposed on him by his obsession or obsessions. But otherwise as I have showed Lewis's theory of the comic is the exact opposite of Bergson's.[31] Robert Chapman, therefore, is a little mistaken when he says, "The laugh of a Tyro exposes the body's mechanism, it reveals a person behaving like a thing--the nature of Comedy for Lewis."[32] I repeat, Lewis sees cause for laughter in a thing behaving like a person. The repetitive mechanical life of a man passes for normal, but to an observant eye this repetitiveness is as easily detectable as that in an animal's life:

> A man is made drunk with his boat or restaurant as he is with a merry-go-round: only it is the staid, everyday drunkenness of the normal real, not always easy to detect. We can all see the ascendance a 'carousel' has on men, driving them into a set narrow intoxication. The wheel at Carisbrooke imposes a set of movements upon the donkey inside it, in drawing water from the well, that is easy to grasp. But in the case of a hotel or a fishing-boat, for instance the complexity of rhythmic scheme is so great that it passes as open and untrammelled life. This subtle and wider mechanism merges, for the spectator, in the general variety of nature. Yet we have in most lives the spectacle of a pattern as circumscribed and complete as a theorem of Euclid.[33]

In this sense all of us are automata performing our mechanistic functions. In Bergson's book only the comic are automata. To both Lewis and Bergson laughter is an exposure of the automatic gestures and ready made values of the comic

character who is machine-like in his behaviour, but Lewis's reversal and in a way extension of Bergson's theory has given it a wider and deeper perspective; particularly in its application to the characters and situations in The Wild Body.

In Rotting Hill, the working class are all deprived of their identities and reduced to mere appendages of the tools they work with. The stories in Rotting Hill are, I think, inferior to the stories in The Wild Body. Perhaps the more appropriate thing to say is that they are different. They are semi-fictional, journalistic narratives based on the author's actual experiences in the world of post-war London. They can be categorized under the body of writing which is now known as literature of reportage (for example, works like Norman Mailer's Armies of the Night and Truman Capote's In Cold Blood). The stories and sketches paint a remarkably true picture of life in London at the time of their writing. Like The Wild Body, the book has one theme: a keen, powerful and critical description of a defeated country in various stages of bomb-shattered decay. Lewis here is a chronicler in disguise as a fictionist. The central metaphor of rot, realized through vivid prose imagery, has made some of the stories valuable and memorable. Probably no other book preserves so well the atmosphere of the post-war London for posterity. The examination of the workings of the 'rot' is the subject matter of Chapter Three.

Unlucky for Pringle

The stories in the collection Unlucky for Pringle encompass a long period of time, from 1911 to 1956. They are closer to The Wild Body than to Rotting Hill. Unlike the stories in these books they have no common theme; but Lewis's pre-occupation with human beings as machines, with the absurdity of sudden violence, and with human places of residence is found throughout. They do not contain either any of the political commentary with which Lewis is involved in Rotting Hill. If they are "political" they are political only by implication. The many characters who live within these pages are not the primitives of The Wild Body; they are urban characters, though no less mechanical as they act in obedience and servility to their obsessions. For example, Pringle in the title story, "Unlucky for Pringle" (1911, written during the same time period as The Wild Body stories) changes rooms with religious regularity. Pringle is an anomaly to the narrator who is somewhat in doubt as to whether he sees Pringle as he really is or as the "Pringle" who projects himself in words. However he thinks that he has detected the particular strangeness in Pringle that has been responsible for Pringle's expulsion from one residence after another:

> Pringle has always remained the strangest of my friends. He is like the passion of the book collector or amateur of furniture and practical arts. Only his taste is for the accidental --just whatever life brings. One might almost say that the chief value of anything for Pringle is its accidental quality, its inevitability in the succession of the accidents of life-- the fact that just that thing turned up (whatever it be) and no other. He is as much elated, in his way, by the shabby

furniture in the rooms of some London lodging-house as another would be over a room full of Louis Quinze. In the case of a man of genius the mediocrity of his daily life--his lodging, however mean, with the rest--takes a warmth and vitality from him....Pringle not possessed of exceptional gifts, had been strangely endowed with his gusto for the Common Circumstance of his life;...originally seeking merely suitable conditions for his work,...gradually this got the upper hand, as it were, so that it seemed almost...that his sole pre-occupation consisted in sampling these conditions.[34]

The preoccupation with residences and hotels is seen very frequently in Lewisian fiction, from the very early stories to the later novel Self-Condemned where the author says, "The hotel contains everything belonging to human society. The hotel in a sense is the city. The hotel is the state. The hotel is the world."[35]

Dicky Dean, another machine, is fixed on the idea that he must develop enough combative skills to defeat the paramours of his women in a series of fights. He has this realization after his six foot two inch frame has been badly battered by his wife's medium sized Australian lover. The description of the fight is important because of the machine imagery used:

> Alec Bannerman [the lover] was a medium sized young Australian, who seemed almost small compared to Dean's height and overall heaviness. But this well-knit belted figure began springing to left and right like a mechanical toy, and his fists landed upon Dean's as if to order--bang bang bang bang ....A compact seemingly heavily loaded machine, was battering away at him, and before he realized what was happening, he was at the other side of the room. This experienced figure had...blacked his eye, knocked one of his teeth out, and demoralized him from head to foot.[36]

The lover is almost a machine-gun. Dicky Dean, the hero of "The man who was unlucky with women" (a story published by

Fox and Chapman for the first time and attributed to 1951) resorts to divorce after this humiliating defeat, then to intensive training in boxing at a gymnasium. He soon finds an occasion to display his skill as his mistress is cheating on him too. This time he takes the lover outside and flattens him quite easily. But Lewis has a propensity for absurd and perverse violence, that gives a strange turn to the end of quite a few of his stories. In this story a wolf hound has been wathcing this indecorous display. He decides to intervene and before very long it is apparent that Dean cannot defend himself against a wolf-hound; this has not been part of his training. The mechanical pattern for action breaks down, leaving the machine-man dazed, and rendering him incapable of dealing with a novel situation. Dicky Dean cannot even laugh. He is declared dead on arrival at the hospital.

"Pish-Tush" a story first published in Encounter in 1956, also has a violent end. A female spook introduces itself as Constance to the living occupant of a London apartment, Frances Jevons. The spook describes its position as rather like that of a mouse. This is an interesting point because of the implication that the will, the soul or the centre of being human must depend on an organic substance, however insubstantial, however small, however invisible. Frances feels this substance one day as a slippery fishy substance. The chatter between the two annoys Lethbridge, a neighbour whom Frances calls "Pish-Tush". Obsessed as he is

with other peoples' affairs he brings a spray gun full of D.D.T., which appears to be an extension of his own mechanical self, and violently intrudes upon the harmless spook and Frances. The spook is immune to D.D.T., but not to the human reaction of anger. At the first opportunity it coils its will into a rope and neatly strangles "Pish-Tush" in his bed. Apart from this violent end the story is significant for many speeches that concern the body, the will and life. For example, consider the following passages:

"To exist even like a fly on the wall, is life. To be able to think, a great deal. I sued to fear extinction."

"...How does one die? One rather violently goes to sleep."

"I am the energy that it takes to move a bird about. I am the centre of a will--a will to see, to move, to speak...and the will weighs something--depending on how much one is willing."

"Have you not sometimes felt something less than material, detached from the temporal?"[37]

These passages may sound light hearted, even gay, but the implications are metaphysical. The will weighs something, the will is insurmountable. Even the disembodied will can do what it wills. The supernatural aspect of the story might be questionable. But one can easily see that Lewis always sees the mind as an oddity outside the body and yet dependent on it. Spooks also have to materialize their will organically. The spook is really a "will", thwarted, ousted from a comfortable residence. It is bent upon revenge. The pre-dominance of the will over the corporeal is demonstrated forcefully and violently.

In the last story in this collection, entitled "Doppelgänger", Lewis assumes his characteristic role of an observer of the social phenomena in which "the average of mankind looks upon the famous, especially if they are highbrow or intellectual, as dehumanized as a statue on a pedestal in a public park."[38] This image-building on the part of the public can really ruin the genuine poet, in this case Thaddeus Trunk whose creative genius is practically bled by this image. The public is a parasite. The poet or the artist "wishes to live his publicity figure. There it is inside his house--in his bedroom...a publicity figure, not a real man. So when is he a poet?...For a man's publicity is a caricature of himself; it is really how the public sees 'greatness'."[39] Thaddeus Trunk has fallen a victim to this public image of himself.

> Only a shadow, a shell, remained upon the mountain. In the mountain mists a bulky phantom of publicity like one of those over size garish posters which are so repulsively familiar continued to milk a goat there, and to spit imaginary blood. But bit by bit, this advertisement figure evaporated, and there was nothing left at all of the one time poet who had been devoured by that Moloch, the Public.[40]

"Dopplegänger" belongs with the kind of character study made of the historian Eldred in "The Room Without a Telephone", a story in Rotting Hill.

Unlucky for Pringle is a commendable posthumous anthology in the first place because it brings together short stories that Lewis may not have anthologized in his life-time

because of the lack of a common theme; but these stories reflect almost all Lewis's pre-occupations in fiction. In the second place, the collection makes available some of the short stories which otherwise might have languished on the shelves of libraries or in the archives at Cornell.

No comment on Unlucky for Pringle can be adequate without a reference to the war stories in it. These stories along with Lewis's ideas on war could be fruitfully inquired into in another thesis. The soldiers, the lieutenants, the captains are even greater men-machines than some of the other characters in Lewis's work. They are appendages to their flying pigs (trench mortars) and to the guns they brandish. They are war puppets. They are imbued with the impersonal violence of the battlefield. Lewis was an artillery officer in the First World War. Needless to say this experience influenced both his painting and writing. The metallic quality that comes through so forcefully in a painting entitled 'A Battery Shelled' (1919) is in the soldier characters in his fiction as well. It is this metallic quality which Eric Newton emphasizes when he describes this particular canvas:

> ...the dugout entrance, the bits of corrugated iron, the shattered trees, the members of the gun team, the officers in the foreground--these are really worthy of his [Lewis's] close attention. They have to be coaxed and translated until they become inevitable symbols of scientific violence, disciplined chaos. It would be easy but ineffective to turn them all into metal...that would also be boring. But they, must hint at metal: the officers' faces look as though they might have been cast in a mould, even though they are flesh...The rhythm of metal rather than metal itself is in the picture. A meta-

morphosis has taken place nature has lost, under Lewis's treatment, a great deal of herself.[41]

Some of the characters in these war stories are completely dehumanized. Lewis's soldier characters are inhuman metal machines. One of the characters, Cantleman, regards his brother officers simply as A B C D. He regards Stella, his spring-mate, a beautiful full bodied woman, as merely a semenal receptacle. He devours his mate. Berenson, another soldier, "a dealer in hardness" when asked by Tets, his sweetheart, if he loved her a little bit, muses, "Was the mink to inquire of the panther whether he would always kiss so nicely, while he was giving the mink a preliminary lick before devouring his prey?"[42] In face of certain death Cantleman is as objective, detached and as brutal as a machine. Lewis's soldier characters possess what he calls in The Art of Being Ruled "the murderous absentmindedness"[43] of machines. Another soldier Burney Polderdick is the "King of the Trenches" in the story of that title. His personal mad egotism which makes him shout crazily "I am the King of the Trenches!" and send many to destruction in an erratic shelling would make him an even more dangerous man-machine, if he were commander not merely of the limited narrow kingdom of the Trenches but of a country. Then who could remove him from his command, who could stop him from causing annihilation of mankind in gigantic proportions? Rob Cairn another soldier protagonist of the story, "The French Poodle" "had never killed any animal; never a bird; not a mouse, not knowingly an insect..."[44]

but had killed men in the battlefield. The machinery of war has finally turned him into a murderous machine, so much so that he kills his beloved mascot, the french poodle, before going into battle to die.

The technology of war has brutalized the machine. It has brought about a colossal metamorphosis. Sometimes I think that Lewis's polemic works are long foot-notes to his fiction. In The Art of Being Ruled he remarks:

> Instead of the static circle of the rotation of the crops, or the infinitely slow progress of handiwork, we are in the midst of the frenzied evolutionary war of the machines. This affects our view of everything; our life, its objects and uses, love, health, friendship, politics:...[45]

In the Introduction to Men Without Art Lewis also says, "Implicit in the serious work of art will be found politics, theology, philosophy--in brief all the great intellectual departments of human consciousness,..."[46] This statement applies fully to the three anthologies of his short fiction discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MEN-MACHINES IN THE WILD BODY

The Wild Body is a collection of stories written mostly prior to World War I. Lewis rewrote and in some cases renamed these early stories for this collection published in 1927. The collection has in its first seven stories a common storyteller by the name of Ker-Orr, who describes his experiences while travelling in Spain and Brittany. These stories are followed by the two essays called "Inferior Religions" and "The Meaning of the Wild Body", which, as Wyndham Lewis says in the Foreword to The Wild Body "serve as a commentary on the system of feeling developed in these tales, and as an explanation if that is needed, of the title..."[1] In the Foreword he also points out that the first story called "The Soldier of Humour", which was published in two instalments in The Little Review in 1917-1918, presents Ker-Orr "at a later stage of his comic technique than in the accounts of his adventures in Brittany".[2] In point of fact, Ker-Orr was invented after the first writing of nearly all of the stories that are placed before the two essays to serve as a fictional

device, by means of which the author keeps at a certain distance from the characters he has created. For example, "Les Saltimbanques" was published in 1909 in The English Review and in its original form includes no reference to the narrator. In its revised form Ker-Orr becomes the witness of the action. The story was revised and renamed "The Cornac and His Wife" especially for The Wild Body collection. So we see that the stories are unified not only as they were in their original form by a common geographical setting, Brittany and Spanish Galicia, but also in their revised form are further unified by the presence of a common narrator.

The two essays serve rather like a strong punctuation between the first set of stories and the two called "Sigismund" and "You Broke My Dream" which are placed after them.[3] In these the intermediary is dropped, the locale is shifted but the primitive machines are still there; however, now thy act in an urban landscape. These two stories, we are informed in the Foreword, are of a much later date. All the same, these stories belong to the system of feeling developed in this collection. They too show man's body as a machine and the mind as an entity separate from, and yet attached to it. Further they demonstrate how these men-machines conform to certain patterns. In Rude Assignment, in which Lewis writes his literary autobiography, while talking about his work, he says:

Satire appeared--if that is the name for it--in a setting of the barbarically simple, as fishermen and vagabonds. The

pieces so produced were to be entitled "Inferior Religions". Inferior Religions is, however, a term the application of which could be extended to almost everything. All except the great religions are materials for laughter. Worship of the state, like worship of a fishing boat by a fisherman, is imbecilic-though hardly a laughing matter.[4]

Why did Lewis prefer the title The Wild Body to "Inferior Religions"? He does not answer the question explicitly in either Rude Assignment or in the two essays in The Wild Body; but it seems obvious to me that the focus is primarily on the machine body; and secondarily on the religion which is the centre of the wild body's mechanical motion. As Lewis explains in "Inferior Religions":

The fascinating imbecility of the creaking men-machines, that some little restaurant or fishing-boat works, was the original subject of these studies, though in fact the nautical set never materialized. The boat's tackle, and dirty little shell, or the hotel and its technique of hospitality, keeping the limbs of the men and women involved in a monotonous rhythm from morning till night, that was the occupational background, placed in Brittany or in Spanish Galicia.[5]

The men presented in the stories appear as machines because of the grotesque patterns created by description which relies heavily on external detail. Bergson in his essay "Laughter" points out that "The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine."[6] In these stories because of the special mode of description, what usually appear as normal organic forms and shapes are transformed into grotesque mechanical patterns by the deliberate use of metonymy which relies heavily on the description of external detail. I have pointed out how Lewis's theory of the comic

differs from Bergson's but there is no doubt that Lewis is in agreement with Bergson that man is laughable when seen as machine. It is in their interpretation of this phenomenon that they differ. Lewis's prose-camera focuses on the human bodies in the stories in The Wild Body in such a way that they appear like "human and fallible machines". They are captured in their rhythmic and involuntary actions in all too human slavery to their various vocations. Lewis himself describes these creatures in terms of snapshots and photographs. He says:

> The finest humour is the great play-shapes blown up or given off by the tragic corpse of life underneath the world of the camera. This futile, grotesque, and sometimes pretty spawn, is what in this book is snapshotted by the imagination.[7]

In the same context, he says that "The chemistry of personality...puffs up in frigid balls, soapy snowmen, arctic carnival-masks, which we can photograph and fix."[8]

The Persona as "A Soldier of Humour" and as an Illustration of the Body/Mind Dichotomy

Ker-Orr is as much a puppet as any of the other puppets in the stories. The difference is that according to Lewis's own testimony, he is the author's puppet:

> To introduce my puppets, and the Wild Body, the generic puppet of all, I must project a fanciful wandering figure to be the showman to whom the antics and solemn gambols of these wild children are to be a source of strange delight. In the first of these stories he makes his appearance.[9]

Ker-Orr, Lewis's puppet-showman, pounces on the rest of the puppets purely for his own delight. He is pre-conditioned to see people in a certain way, that is as mindless machines;

just as Don Quixote saw giants where only windmills existed because his head was stuffed with the romances he had been reading. In this sense Ker-Orr is as ridiculous a figure as Don Quixote. A parallel can also be drawn between Ker-Orr and Gulliver. In Ker-Orr we are presented with another instance of meta-satire in which the figure of the satirist himself becomes the focal point of the writer's attention. A concrete example of the showman's pre-conditioned way of viewing his subjects can be found in the story called "The Death of the Ankou". Ker-Orr has been reading tourist literature pertaining to the area. At one point in his reading he encounters the local myth of the blind death-god called the Ankou. Ker-Orr stops reading and lifts his eyes only to see an imperious looking blind beggar called Ludo as the Ankou. The experience has a powerful impact on Ker-Orr; furthermore it illustrates the inherent lacuna in absolute observation. That is, one sees what one has been pre-conditioned to see at a particular time or place by an immediate stimulus or by a lifetime of experience or learning:

> The blinded figure had burst into my daydream so unexpectedly and so pat, that I was taken aback by this sudden close-up of so trite a tragedy. Where he had come was compact with an emotional medium emitted by me. In reality, it was a private scene, so that this overweening intruder might have been marching through my mind with his taut convulsive step, club in hand, rather than merely traversing the eating-room of a hotel, after a privileged visit to the kitchen. Certainly at that moment my mind was lying open so much, or was so exteriorized, that almost literally as far as I was concerned, it was inside, not out, that this image forced its way. Hence, perhaps, the strange effect.[10]

In this passage Lewis is dramatizing a complex phenomenon.

Ker-Orr has seen in reality the close-up of the legendary death-god he has been reading about. Reality and imagination have met. The curious fact is that he projects the figure of the death-god on the majestic blind man who has just marched through the room which is his by local right and simultaneously through the mind of the intruding tourist that Ker-Orr in truth is. As the narrator Ker-Orr is aware of why this happens; and this awareness further sets him apart from the men-machines he observes. Here as in the other stories he is the observer, narrator and a character in the story itself.

Ker-Orr's role as a character differs from story to story; but his role as a narrator/observer does not change. He observes without emotion, without sentiment. Indeed, as an observer he suffers or perhaps benefits from that "anaesthesia of heart" which Bergson thinks is a primary condition for any observation of the comic. This does not, however, mean that his dispassionate state deprives him of all compassion. In some stories as in "A Soldier of Humour" for instance, in which he is one of the two chief characters, his involvement is greater. In "Brotcotnaz" he is merely a peripheral witness. In fact his role is ambivalent; he finds himself wondering "What part did I play in this?"[11] It is this ambivalence that makes it possible for the reader to see this showman from many angles.

Ker-Orr, however, is always directed to detached observation as much as it is possible. In this connection

one of Lewis's remarks in Rude Assignment is important:

> For the whole virtue of accurate observation is that it is a person observing stereoscopically...De la Rochefoucald, described by Voltaire as the most important writer of the seventeenth century, observed human nature with a detached eye. But he observed with some violence; one is always conscious of the person there--no person, of course is capable of perfect detachment: the effort to attend to it would damage the observation.[12]

A stereoscope is an optical instrument through which two pictures of the same object, taken from slightly different points and viewed, one by each eye, produces the effect of a single picture of the object, with the appearance of depth or relief. Ker-Orr, in his accounts almost always produces this stereoscopic effect. Although Ker-Orr is outside the society he observes, above and beyond the life that exists there, what Lewis says of Rochefoucald is true of Ker-Orr. There is a degree of violence in his observation and one is always conscious of his presence. Ker-Orr is detached only to the extent to which observation is not damaged. Total detachment is neither humanly possible nor artistically desirable. A fair example of the stereoscopic way of seeing and the stereoscopic picture it produces is Ker-Orr's description of his own body:

> My body is large, white and savage. But all the fierceness has become transformed into laughter. It still looks like a visi-gothic fighting machine but it is in reality a laughing machine....Everywhere where formerly I would fly at throats, I now howl with laughter. That is me.[13]

Ker-Orr is observing his body in a detached manner and from two angles which can be separately characterized as the animal and the mechanical. The word 'savage' suggests the animal and

the word 'machine' the mechanical. Ker-Orr as the soldier of humour has sublimated his violence, his savagery, into laughter. He has transformed his fighting-machine body into a laughing-machine, a wild body that laughs.

Ker-Orr as the soldier of humour undertakes his journey with the sole purpose of amusing himself by observing the men-machines which he encounters. Lewis has adapted one of the classic devices of satire, namely the journey which in prose narrative, is the equivalent of 'satura' the basic form of Roman verse satire. As Paulson points out in Fiction of Satire, "Satura is like a house of mirrors in which one theme is reflected over and over again with distortions and variations but without essential change."[14] The archetypal symbols of the journey and the hotel have been used effectively by Lewis. They reflect repeatedly the same patterns as the soldier of humour travels through Brittany and Spanish Galicia seeing people as puppets and machines dancing wildly as they rotate about their variously chosen obsessions.

A work of satire usually relies on a central metaphor or an image which is often used as an instrument of aggression. The mechanical metaphor in these stories, however, is not intended for aggression as much as it is for provocation. Indeed, before Ker-Orr refers to any other character as a machine he has seen himself as a machine. This fact further emphasizes my postulation that Ker-Orr is included in the list of human targets for satire in the stories. He has, however,

many of the characteristics of the typical and traditional protagonist in satiric fiction. He asks questions, goads, coaxes, and probes appearance, custom and myth. He wants to demolish the pretensions of the puppets he meets, sometimes with flesh-tearing sarcasm, the substitute for physical violence in modern society, for invective in social intercourse. He has an insatiable hunger for human beings he can laugh at by anatomizing their ape-like machine-like appearance and behaviour.

There is in "A Soldier of Humour" a suggestion that Ker-Orr's attitude is violent, predatory and canibalistic. Ker-Orr admits the presence of "the beast of humour" in himself whom he has to feed "with such a variety of dishes".[15] Valmore is Ker-Orr's first victim. This man is obsessed by his newly acquired American citizenship. Ker-Orr first isolates this obsession then drives Valmore into a position in which he can expose him as a machine obsessed by his particular fanaticism and then howl with laughter at his plight. Ker-Orr engages in confrontations with Valmore which are really rather violent. These do not result in bloodshed but expose the subject as a grotesque and flawed machine and provide the soldier of humour the relief of laughter:

> So I have never forgotten I am really a barbarian. I have clung coldly to this consciousness. I realize, similarly, the uncivilized nature of my laughter....It sprawls into everything. It has become my life. The result is that I am <u>never</u> serious about anything. I simply cannot help converting everything into burlesque patterns.[16]

The burlesque relies heavily on description, in which

there is a shift from the normal point of view to the microscopic and in some way distorted. The tone of Ker-Orr's burlesque pattern is neither shrill nor too savage. He makes a game of everything. It has become his life. His burlesque patterns are intense and bewildering because of their constant use of the mechanical metaphor, but they do not fail to amuse. Ker-Orr's description of himself is a burlesque pattern too, as is evident from the passages already quoted and again from the following description:

> I experience no embarassment in following the promptings of my fine physique. My sense of humour in its mature phase has arisen in this very acute consciousness of what is me. In playing that off against another hostile me that does not like the smell of mine, probably finds my large teeth, height and so forth abominable. I am in a sense working off my alarm at myself. So I move on a more primitive level than most men, I expose my essential me quite coolly,and all men shy a little. This forked, strange-scented blond-skinned gut-bag with its two bright rolling marbles with which it sees, bull's-eyes full of mockery and madness, is my stalking-horse. I hang somewhere in its midst operating it with detachment.[17]

With his large teeth, his height and his marble-like eyes full of madness, he is abominable. The important thing is that he not only sees his body as barbaric, but has also learnt to accept it and control it. Other men are embarassed by the body's compelling needs for food, coitus and excretion--perhaps a thousand other needs that if indulged in might be branded as perversions. Ker-Orr argues for the acceptance of the body with all its repetitive, unsightly, compulsive mechanical functions. In his manipulation of Ker-Orrs' activities Lewis has been able to stress a point which he had

made explicit in an article published in The New Age in 1910, entitled "Our Wild Body". In it he said that he wanted the body to be discussed openly and to be celebrated unashamedly. Lewis objects that "The body is sung about, ranted about, abused, cut about by doctors, but never talked about."[18] In this context Lewis stresses that the English particularly find it embarassing to talk about the body. It seems to me then that it is not without satiric intention that Ker-Orr, his showman, is the only character whose nationality is English. All of Ker-Orr's burlesque patterns bear the mark of their author. As Julian Symons observes, "Burlesque depends upon the quality of the mind that creates it. Lewis is a philosopher and a painter and he has played at burlesque both with thought and appearance."[19]

Thus it is the thought content in the burlesque portrait of Ker-Orr that explicitly stresses the separation of the human being into two selves: the self that is an operable machine and the self that can see this and does not like the machine's awkward appearance, function and smell. The first italicized 'me' in the passage stands for the body which is an awkward machine; and the second one for the mind which has to operate it and come to terms with it. Nowhere in the stories is there even the slightest suggestion that the body is something to be ashamed of. The body is a thing which, as an intricate machine, is an embarrassment to the mind in its appearance, movements and smell. The mind is alarmed by its biological structure but the message is clear: the mind

must not be alarmed but must learn to know it, master it and operate it. It is the wild body in all its activities. The other creature, the real self, the intelligent principle, however, should be, if life is to have any meaning at all, a laughing observer. Ker-Orr is this laughing observer in the stories. He is also the wild body which he observes and operates. Ker-Orr sometimes sounds very arrogant when he sees other bodies in terms of latches, shutters, slides, blinkers and discs, but never less than brilliant. Derision is the purpose of Ker-Orr's descriptive observation. The reader has no choice but to accept the subject of condemnation, for it is held steadily before his eyes, through the repeated use of an extended mechanical metaphor which transforms the body into a machine again and again. Thus the use of the mechanical metaphor separates the body from the mind and makes the body/mind dichotomy thus postulated become an instrumental concept in the satire contained in the short stories. The mechanical metaphor by its very nature--for the machine must move--implies action; therefore, the stories narrated by Ker-Orr are comedies of action. There is far more action in the stories than dialogue.

Ker-Orr meets Mr. Valmore in the Fonda del Mundo, the World Inn. He speaks of the hotel as an enigmatical universe in which he observes his first victim. The character of Valmore is disclosed bit by bit, as though in slow motion. The initial focus is on the clothes, the revealing externals of man:

He was dressed with sombre floridity. In his dark purple-slate suit with thin crimson lines, in his dark red hat-band, in his rose-buff tie, swarming with cerulean fire-flies, in his stormily flowered waistcoat, you felt that his taste for the violent and sumptuous had everywhere struggled to assert itself, and everywhere been overcome. But by what? That was the important secret of this man's entire machine....He was part of the mystery of the hotel....his small sunken eyes were fixed on me imperturbably, with the blankness of two metal discs.[20]

Valmore's flamboyance is due to a fixed idea that he must appear as an authentic American to everyone and at all times must impress everybody as such. His snobbery is of gigantic proportions. Consequently, he is a suitable target for satire. Everything about his native country in particular and Europe in general is inferior to what is to be found in the United States:

'Guess you goin' to Spain?' he said. 'Waal, Americans are not like' very much in that country. That country, sir, is barb'rous; you kant believe how behind in everything that country is! All you have to do is to look smart there to make money. No need to worry there. No, by gosh! Just sit around and ye'll do bett' dan zee durn dagos!'

The american citizenship wiped out the repulsive fact of his southern birth, otherwise, being a Gascon, he would have been almost a dago himself.[21]

Here is a burlesque pattern of speech, although I dare say this is exactly how Valmore's newly-acquired American English must have sounded. Ker-Orr gratuitously insults the Gascon-turned American in his own native tongue. His insult brings the outraged response, "Yes, Sir, and that's more'n zee darn English do!"[22] The fatuously characteristic Frenchman, chauvanistic about his American citizenship, has brought the combat to an America-versus-England basis. He is quite stunned when Ker-Orr insists on his French not his American

identity:

'Why, mon vieux...how about the South of France! the South of France! The bloody Midi, your home-land, you poor bum!' I gnashed my teeth as I said this.[23]

The soldier of humour gnashes his teeth as he gets ready for battle. Valmore is too paralyzed by this fierce invective to work his fists like piston rods as Ker-Orr feels he might. This total paralysis is probably caused by the last word in the invective which is peculiarly American. Ker-Orr goes up to his room where he howls with laughter on his bed; he says, "My orgasm left me weak...then as usually happened with me, I began sentimentally pitying my victim."[24] These words reveal some new facets of his character. First his claim at the very outset is that he does not explain away life with sex, rather he tries to explain life in terms of laughter but the word "orgasm" poses a question; is laughter for him, apart from being a substitute for violence, an erotic variant of sex? Secondly, Ker-Orr does regard the characters he meets as his potential victims, his dishes, as he said earlier on. But the soldier of humour is not so tough as to be without any compassion. In this context, Geoffrey Wagner's observation is relevant:

Ker-Orr by no means looks down on the comic effigies of these first stories; he himself is simply another type of alienated individual, equally anti-romantic though in his case an intellectual outlaw. This lends the eccentricity (his behaviour and mode of observation) a note of affection, which we never find again in Lewis's satire.[25]

Valmore, however, proves a powerful adversary. The battle continues in Spain where Valmore uses his wealth and

influence to make Ker-Orr miserable. Luckily for Ker-Orr, he meets three American friends and plans an elaborate revenge. The occurence is in the nature of burla: a practical joke, something that occurs frequently in Lewis's fiction; for example, Zagreus in The Apes of God is a monstrous practical joker, so is the Bailiff in The Childermass. In this story Lewis notes, "In Spain it is safer to seek adventures than to avoid them. That is at least the sensation you will have if you are sensitive to this national principle, which is impregnated with burla, or burlesque excitants."[26] The episode of revenge described in hyperbolic terms as a great moment in American history, heightens the satire of the incident. Ker-Orr's friends are to play on Valmore's Americanism and enjoy his hospitality in a restaurant and Ker-Orr is supposed to walk in casually:

> No man surprised by his mortal enemy in the midst of an enervating debauch, or barely convalescent from a bad illness, could have looked more nonplussed. But Monsieur de Valmore turned with a characteristic blank childish appeal to his nurses or boon companions for help, especially to Taffany [one of the Americans]. Perhaps he was shy or diffident of taking up actively his great role, when more truly great actors were present. Would not the divine America speak or thunder through them, at this intruder? He turned a pair of solemn, appealing, outraged dog's eyes upon Taffany. Would not his master repulse and chastise this insolence?[27]

When one of the Americans introduces Ker-Orr to Valmore, he just does not know how to behave. Taken by surprise Valmore just disintegrates. The Americans push him from one chair to another in mock-regard for his comfort. He is really being treated like a fool:

> His racial instinct was undergoing the severest revolution it had yet known. An incarnation of sacred America herself had commanded him to take me [Ker-Orr] to his bosom. And, as the scope of my victory dawned upon him, his personal mortification assumed the proportion of a national calamity. For the first time since the sealing of his citizenship he felt that he was only a Frenchman from the Midi....The Soldier of Humour is chivalrous, though implacable. I merely drank a bottle of champagne at his expense...I withdrew with my forces to riot in barbarous triumph....[28]

Valmore is defeated on his own grounds and by his own fellow Americans. His humiliation is as complete as Ker-Orr's victory. His snobbery is shattered as his Americanism is. The soldier of humour is barbaric and implacable.

Ker-Orr's childish joy in his victory suggests even more strongly that Lewis means to include his persona as well in this gallery of puppets. For is it not his religion to hunt down and corner men-machines to satisfy the violent hunger for laughter? Surely the satirist is being satirized. Again, there is basis, however small, for seeing Ker-Orr as an object of satire. This basis increases and decreases in direct proportion to the role he plays in various stories. "A Soldier of Humour" is a story of exposition. The theme stated here is repeated in the rest of the stories. Ker-Orr's searching angle is always at the ready to hunt out the puppets and to probe their fanatic preoccupations.

The emphasis in the rest of the stories is as it is in "A Soldier of Humour" on (1) depiction of the characters as clockwork automata through a description of details which largely confines attention to the physically observable in mechanical terms; (2) focus on the obsession of each individual

character which is his inferior religion, around which the body-machine moves automatically; and the final and unexpected breakdown of this automatic pattern; (3) insistence on a body-mind dichotomy; (4) a corresponding duality between the artist/intellectual and mankind in general; (5) passages involving face to face confrontation, hostility and violence, much of which is capriciously motivated; and (6) laughter as a substitute for violence.

These elements are repeated and enlarged until they take the proportion of a central design. While the character and behaviour patterns of the men-machines change from story to story, even sometimes within the same story the central design remains the same. Since each piece relates a separate tale and makes its own unique statement I have decided to deal with each story separately; however, in the third chapter I will deal with the stories in Rotting Hill as a body, in which any individual pattern has been subordinated to the overruling metaphor of "the rot".

Beau Sejour

This is a delightful study of contending personalities in a small pension; Ker-Orr's role is limited to observation. The pension is inhabited by a number of parasitical artists mostly Russians, called "Poles", whose history is sketched in The Wild Body in Lewis's essay, "The Pole", which appears as an appendage to the story "Beau Sejour". Zoborov is the main character in the story. After years of sponging

on the proprietress he manages to oust her in a vaguely diabolical plot. He is a sinister character, though his conniving capabilities have not been clearly defined. His unrealistic pretensions are to independence in spite of the fact that he has been living off Mme. Peronnette, the proprietress for years. He has a fixed idea; independence is his goal. In a surprising turn of events, which shocks the narrator as well as the reader, he achieves his goal. At the end of the story he is seen as the richly-dressed owner of Beau Sejour. Mme. Peronnette calls him "an ill-conditioned individual" as though he were a machine out of order; but in descriptions of him the animal metaphor has been used more than the mechanical. Zoborov is essentially a disgusting smelly, evil creature who is constantly described in feline terms:

> His 'inferiority complex' brought forward his tremendous chest, when threatened, with above it his cat-like face seeming to quizz, threaten and go to sleep all at once, with his mouth drawn to a point, in a purring position.[29]

Zoborov seems to belong to the Lewisian characters classifiable as foxes. He is one of those foxes who are destroyers and acquire power not by right but by force. Lewis in his analysis of the fox character in Shakespeare's plays in the book <u>The Lion and the Fox</u> recalls that Machiavelli always impressed on princes who wanted power this fact:

> To have power--that is to say to become, not by right but by force, the mechanical destiny of other people--you must train your personality with a superhuman severity. You must be as slippery as the eel and as daring as the cat.[30]

Zoborov is a slippery character. One does not really know how he achieved his goal - independence and proprietorship of the Beau Sejour, the place where he was just a non-paying boarder. I suspect that his force comes from the fact that he does not participate in the sexual activities that go on in the pension. Ker-Orr states that Zoborov took no interest in women and suspects him to be a eunuch.[31] This gives Zoborov a position of power over the proprietress who indulges in passionate sexual encounters with a German boarder, Carl. She is supposedly engaged to the German who makes heavy demands for money on her, which weaken her financial position. Certainly this is a contributing factor in her final financial ruin and Zoborov's acquisition of her property. Zoborov's abstinence from sex provides him with a defence mechanism. What Lewis says of the man of the world in the context of the analysis of the fox in The Lion and the Fox is true of Zoborov:

> He is a man who is himself small and weak, but who has acquired, who lives in the midst of, a powerful defensive machinery. He is in this sense the champion of the mechanical, and the constant adversary of the individual.[32]

Zoborov, as the machine body observed by Ker-Orr presents yet another example of the man-machine engaged in worship of his inferior religion which is acquisition of wealth by any means.

The claim in "A Soldier of Humour" that there is no sex interest in The Wild Body stories is not quite justified.[33] "Beau Sejour" is a highly sexual story. The pension literally seethes with sex. Nocturnal sexual encounters between Carl, the German, and the proprietress, between Carl and the maids

who work in the place, seem to be nightly occurences. Carl's white and black nude figure is seen running around in the corridors on more than one occasion. Ker-Orr also admits to sleeping with the maids. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, Zoborov is the only exception. Also there is much violence. Carl regularly beats Mme. Peronnette after arguments usually over his borrowing from her and over his sexual escapades with the maids.

In this story the face to face hostility and violence expresses itself in dancing. In Lewisian fiction dance often becomes the language of ceremonial gesture which expresses what words cannot express. That is, caught up in the ceremony and ritual of dancing, the characters act out their roles. The dance does what dialogue can never achieve. For example, the following description of the dance reveals the very essence of the relationship between Carl and Mme. Peronnette:

> Carl and Mademoiselle Peronnette danced. She was a big woman about thirty. Her empty energetic face was pretty, but rather dully and evenly laid out. Her back when en fête was a long serpentine blank with an embroidered spine. When she got up to dance she held herself forward, bare arms hanging on either side, two big meaty handles...what she suggested to me was something like a mad butcher, who had put a piece of bright material over a carcass of pork or mutton, and then started to ogle his customers....Carl on this occasion behaved like the hallucinated customer of such a pantomine, who came into the shop, had entered into the spirit of the demented butcher, and proceeded to waltz with his sex promoted food...while the proprietress undulated and crackled in complete independence, held roughly in place by his two tentacles.[34]

The pair are made to look like interlocked machines by yet another clever technique. Their body parts are scrutinized separately as though they had nothing to do with the whole.

The entire action in this passage unfolds like a reel of film projected so slowly that one is able to see the body in terms of its various components and automatic undulations. These lusty wild bodies are what Lewis calls standardized theorems; Péronnette is packaged sex and Carl is the customer. But at the same time these puppets give an illusion of reality because they are presented in constant hypnotic motion which suggests both the animal and the machine. The dance continues:

> Zoborov...rolled his painful proletarian weight once or twice around the room. The 'Blue Danube' rolled on; Carl poured appreciative oily light into Mademoiselle Peronnette's eyes, she redoubled her lascivious fluxions, until Carl, having exhausted all the superlatives of the language of the eyes, cut short their rhythmical advances, and becoming immobile in the middle of the room, clasped her in his arms, where she hung like a dying wasp; Carl devouring with much movement the lower part of her face...Carl like a lanky black spider always devouring but never making an end of his meal provided by the palpitating wasp in his arms while the others bobbed on gently around thm.[35]

Apart from the highly sensuous rhythm of the passage the insect imagery further emphsizes the animal/mechanical nature of the human body. The imagery suggests too the canibalistic aspect of the man-woman relationship. The vision that the passage conjures up is of a powerfully primitive dance in which two people are moving automatically to the rhythm of their inferior religion: in this case, sexual lust. The crowd too appears like an extension of the machine as the clause "the others bobbed on gently around them" suggests. The dance represents the rhythm superimposed on the machinery of human life by any inferior religion.

In <u>The Art of Being Ruled</u>, Lewis talks about the way

in which men and women dancing to music in a room appear like "performing mice". He says he borrowed the idea and the phrase from a book called The Future by Professor Low who in this work has offered some predictions regarding the future of mankind from the point of view of science. Lewis elaborates this idea by suggesting "that by far the greater part of people ask nothing better than to be 'performing mice'."[36] In other words, people are content to be bodies moving in a rhythm that is imposed on them as long as the rhythm is effortless, continuous and does not shake them into any rude awakening of the mind.

Lewis, in all his fiction, expresses fascination with dances, parties and hotels. For it is here that men-machines gather and play or jostle together, often in a cosmopolitan atmosphere, and in the process, expose themselves sometimes to one another and always to the fierce eye of the observer. In this story, Ker-Orr the observer/persona has been no less fascinated. It has been a good stay for him as the title, "Beau Sejour", suggests. Zoborov's villiany has been underplayed, I think, in keeping with the sunny and wild atmosphere of The Wild Body stories. All the implications are certainly menacing.

Bestre

As in "Beau Sejour" Ker-Orr does not interact physically with the main character in the story. Bestre is the solitary protagonist. He is an enigma. His past is obscure

and present threatening. His particular passion is to engage in warfare with carefully chosen victims. The nature of this warfare is peculiar and most important to the basic statement of the story. Bestre fixes his victims with piercing glances. His chosen weapon like that of the Lewisian satirist is the eye. The nature of these combats is predatory. He provokes fights in strange ways; for example, he goes out of his way to dump garbage at somebody else's door, simply to provoke a fight so that he can observe the outraged reaction of his victim. In a sense he is the real Lewisian eye-man. Ker-Orr claims that "I learnt a great deal from Bestre. He is one of my masters."[37] Obviously what he learnt from him was to look at people piercingly, particularly at their flaws. From Bestre, too, he could have learnt the art of provocation and the role of the artist as enemy.

Bestre possesses the ability to fix his glance on the weakest point in the enemy's armour:

> The eyes fix on the enemy, on his weakest spot, and do their work. He has the anatomical instinct of the hymenopter for his prey's most morbid spot, for an old wound, for a lurking vanity. He goes into the other's eye, seeks it and strikes. On a physical blemish he turns a scornful and careless rain like a garden hose. If the deep vanity is on the wearer's back or in his walk or gaze, he sluices it with an abundance you would not expect his small eyes to be capable of delivering.[38]

In this passage Lewis might be describing a satirist. For is this not the way in which a satirist operates? Is this not how Ker-Orr looks at his puppets? Within the context of the story Bestre's own fate is that of the satirist. He becomes

an anathema. He has been described in such a way--always with the aid of mechanical/animal imagery--that he is made to look disgusting and charismatic at once. Furthermore, his all-powerful eye, the most significant and valuable part of the satirist's anatomy, has been described in emphatic detail:

> The Eye was really Bestre's weapon: the ammunition with which he loaded it was drawn from all the most skunk-like provender, the most ugly mucins, fungoid glands, of his physique. Excrement as well as sputum would be shot from this luminous hole....Every resource of metonymy, bloody mind transfusion or irony were also his.39

The story further makes the point that observation is not absolute because of the fact that when action is transferred to paper or canvas it is distorted by the artist's own presuppostions and his personal style. "He (Bestre) never seems quite entering into reality, but observing it. He is looking at the reality with a professional eye, so to speak: with a professional liar's."40 Bestre is given to exaggeration while describing action that has been meagre. He has to make up for the famine of reality "by glorifying and surfeiting its return to the imagination."41 This is the lot of the observer-artist. Ker-Orr is satirizing Bestre for the very things he does. It is a curious story. Bestre is in all probability Lewis's master too.

The Cornac and His Wife

This time the locale for the story is neither a pension nor a hotel. It is the roadside in a village where travelling circusmen perform. In this story a family by travelling from

place to place and performing to heartless and stingy crowds, earns a meagre living. All the characters in the story are automata except one little boy in the audience. The Cornac and his family create painful geometric patterns with their ill-nourished bodies. Their medium is their own flesh and bone. They make the most of their suffering for they know that the audience that watches an acrobat jump into a pool of fire almost wishes the acrobat to die. They know the morbid hunger of the crowds for watching someone in pain.

The performers at once resent and court their public. The audience is described as a many-headed beast for whose pleasure the performers must suffer:

> These displays involved the insane contortions of an indignant man and his dirty, breathless wife of whose ugly misery it was required that a daily mournful exhibition should be made of her shrivelled legs, in pantomime hose. She must crucify herself with a scarecrow abandon, this iron and blood automaton, and effect to represent the factor of sex in geometrical posturing. These spells were all related in some way to physical suffering.[42]

The poor woman-automaton must not only give a pathetic display of her body but must project herself as a sex object as well. The artist must crucify himself for the benefit of the public. This group of performers understands their public very well:

> To some extent public and showman understood each other. There was this amount of give and take, that they both snarled over the money that passed between them, or if they did not snarl it was all the worse. There was a unanimity of brutal hatred about that....The public lay back and enjoyed itself, hardly, closely and savagely.[43]

Here again we have an example of face to face hostility. This time it is between the performer and his audience. It is the

rage felt by the performer that sustains him in the face of a snarling public.

In this story Ker-Orr is present only in his capacity as an observer who examines the interaction between the public and the performer. The proprietor begins with a dialogue. The clown supposedly has the main part, but in this case, the action is "punctuated with resounding slaps at each fresh impertinence of the clown. The proprietor was astonishing... this lugubrious personage had woken to the sudden violence of a cheerful automaton."[44] This pugilistic, sadistic showman, although he is able to delight the public with his slapping of the clown, is a far more clownish figure than the painted clown himself. He is able to make clever rejoinders to the clown's wit. Indeed, he has usurped the clown's role. As the showman ring-master he is heroic. He will do anything to satisfy his public. He performs with bitterness acrobatics impossible for a man of his age, ones usually performed by the clown and other subordinates; but not before regarding his public with violent hatred.

The machine metaphor is forcefully in evidence in this story. Lewis uses verbs which suggest mechanical action quite often:

> We were invited to concentrate our minds upon what was going on inside. We had to visualize a colony of much-twisted, sorely-tried intestines, screwed this way and that, as they had never been screwed before. It was an anatomical piece.[45]

This time it is the inside of the body machine; the wires screwed as methodically and intricately as those inside a

television set, on which Ker-Orr fixes his eye. Verbs play a significant role in the machine metaphor. They emphasize and imply the machine like movements of the body. Here as elsewhere in the stories verbs or nouns which suggest mechanical functioning like 'roll', 'spring', 'screw', 'valve', 'twist', 'gear' perform an important function; namely, they activate the mechanical metaphor.

The acrobatics are followed by some conundrums and a trapeze performance. Trapeze walking really is the ultimate in controlled machinelike performance on part of the human body. Suddenly the cornac's wife directs a bitter tirade against the tight-fisted public. She asks for more money, one hand thrust stiffly out. More money falls on the ground. This is a bitter confrontation. The artist must court the public he resents. One cannot do without the other. The body-mind dualism has extended to the relationship between showman and the public. Lewis makes a still further division. He speaks of two publics but before dealing with this point I should like to deal with the relationship between laughter and violence which really is an extension of a relationship already touched upon in the story, "A Soldier of Humour". The clue is in the title itself. The soldier is not of the militant variety; he is a soldier of humour who has sublimated his violence in laughter. Ker-Orr says of himself in "A Soldier of Humour";

...my barbarism and my laughter is a key to the militant figure chosen at the head of this account....he inclines to

worship and deride, to pursue like a riotous moth the comic and the unconscious luminary he discovers; to make war on it and to cherish it like a lover, at once.[46]

Passages concerning the relationship between violence and laughter do not exist in the earlier version of the story, "The Cornac and His Wife"; but what the comments in the revised story have to say is very important. Besides they give Ker-Orr a chance to comment on his own reactions to the interaction he sees between the showman and the public. Why should laughter be so violent? Or rather, why should it be regarded as a substitute for violence? The soldier of humour is

> compelled to go into some frame that was always a simulation of mortal combat...why always violence?...Violence is of the essence of laughter...it is merely the inversion or failure of force. To put it another way it is the grin upon the Deathshead.[47]

In other words laughter can release and replace the impulse to acts of violence. In the primitive, laughter is rooted in the cruel; and the showman knows this:

> He knows the brutal frisson in contact with danger that draws laughter up from the deepest bowel in a refreshing unearthly gush. He knows why he and the clown are always balck and blue, his children performing dogs, his wife a caryatid. He knows Fate since he serves it better than even the peasant.[48]

The story on the whole in its analysis of the relationship of a performer in any field with that of the public is a work of searing intelligence and magnetic force. The performer pays heavily; he gives of himself to the public. He lays himself wide open to the wounds that the public may inflict on him. The crowds are programmed machines. They are herded to their entertainment like children. They accept the

whining and the whiplashing of the circus woman just as they would the reprimand of their employer. They respond to her plea by coughing up coins just as a machine would jingle out change at the pressing of a button. They respond automatically to the standard jokes. This machine-crowd is the main public.

The public however is not a uniform mass; it is a many-headed beast. Yet another part of it rears its head. This is the minority public, a discerning one, whom the artist fears and respects. In this case it is represented by a small thoughtful looking boy who proceeds to jeer loudly. A genuine personality comes to surface which changes a routine circus performance into a unique one. Lewis's interest, apart from his observation of the action and inter-action of the showman and the clown and the stock responses of the audience in turn is focussed on the boy. Lewis says of the boy:

> But he may have been the victim of the unaccountable awakening of a critical vein, grown irresponsibly active...he was launched on a dubious career of offence. He had one of the handsome visionary Breton faces. His oracular vehemence, though bitterly sarcastic, suggested the more romantic kind of motivation. The showman prowled about the enclosure, grinning and casting sidelong glances at his poet: his vanity tickled in some fashion, perhaps; who knows? the boy, persevering blandly, fixing him with his eye.[49]

There are several clues in this passage that suggest that here is a rare phenomena, a genuine discerning viewer (in point of fact, a budding satirist) who springs out of the herd and jolts the mechanical trite operation of this performance. He makes waves and thus spells possible trouble for the ringmaster

who exploits the public. At the same time the showman cannot help feeling flattered as indeed anybody would be, if noticed even in a negative way by a genius. The best clue to the boy's critical faculty is the 'eye' with which he fixes his target. Although vastly complex, this story exposes clearly Lewis's postulation of the body-mind, artist-public dichotomy. The closing paragraph is worth quoting from:

> At last that organism 'the public', as there constitued, fell to pieces at a signal: the trapeze collapsed, the benches broke...the angry tongues of the saltimbanques began their evil retrospective clatter. There had been two Publics, however, this time. It had been a good show.[50]

The boy represents the minority public. Although a minuscule part of the public he serves the purpose of humanizing a public which appears first as an inhuman machine. The story itself has been a great show.

The Death of the Ankou

"The Death of the Ankou" focusses upon the absence of the observing eye in the protagonist in the same way as "Bestre" focusses on the presence of the sharp observing eye of its central character. The story unfolds against the background of the cult, deeply rooted in the culture of rural Brittany, of a death-god called the Ankou. If a drunken peasant on his way home thought he saw the blind Ankou he believed he would die shortly. Under the influence of the church, however, the statues of the death-god had disappeared--only one remained. But the cult flourished as superstitions are likely to persist. At a Pardon (a kind of a Breton pilgrimage)

while under the spell of a guide-book, as I have already mentioned, Ker-Orr sees Ludo, a majestic blind figure with a club pushing his way through the crowd, as the Ankou. Actually he is a beggar who begs as though he were demanding tribute. Since Ker-Orr sees this figure in the image of the Ankou he had been reading about, he is almost intimidated into parting with a few sous for his own protection. The materialization of this figure is so real for Ker-Orr that he feels as though he had seen the death-god. Ludo's appearance on the scene has the quality of a hallucination. So fascinating is the beggar to Ker-Orr that he is--because of his passion for the flawed human machine--compelled to visit him in his cave. The beggar is sightless but proud in his self-exile; he prefers to live away from the people who support him. The pair exchange a few commonplaces and have brandy together. Ker-Orr often uses the bait of alcohol to lure his victims into talking so they can expose themselves for scrutiny to his satirical eye. This time, however,the bait fails, only a silence ensues after the customary toast. In the event of what happens later to Ludo, Ker-Orr's drinking to his health is ironical.

Ludo's reticence does not in any way deter Ker-Orr from scrutinizing this blind machine. In the passage in which this encounter is described Lewis manipulates language in the same way as a camera isolates a part (i.e., the face), zooms in on it and takes a close-up. Close-ups focus on

hidden details; enlargements do not just make objects bigger, they reveal entirely new structural formations of the subject. The sightless Ludo, the Ankou to Ker-Orr, is described with the aid of these techniques so vividly that the blind beggar looms large and vivid. It is almost as though the blind man's very inner mechanism was mercilessly exposed to the public eye. For without eyes how can he see the other person's expression or intention? How can he protect himself? In a passage of what seems to be authorial comment Lewis remarks:

> As I looked at him I realized how the eyes mount guard over the face as well as look out of it. The faces of the blind are hung there like a lantern. Blind people must feel on their skins our eyes upon them: but this sheet of flesh is rashly stuck up in what must appear far outside their control, an object in a foreign world of sight. So in consequence of this divorce, their faces have the appearance of things that have been abandoned by the mind. What is his face to a blind man? Probably nothing more than an organ, an exposed part of the stomach, that is a mouth.[51]

What a remarkable description of the face and how apt the analogy of the stomach! Without eyes the face is as surely a thing as is the body moving automatically without the mind. There is an equation here; it is the eyes, however small, that allow the mind to observe:

> Ludo's face, in any case, was <u>blind</u>; it looked the blindest part of his body, and perhaps the deadest, from which all the functions of a living face had gone. As a result of its irrelevant external situation, it carried on its own life with the outer world, and behaved with all the disinvolture of an internal organ, no longer serving to secrete thought any more than the foot. For after all to be lost <u>outside</u> is much the same as to be hidden in the dark <u>within</u>.--What served for a face for the blind, then? What did they have instead, that was expressive of emotion in the same way our faces are? I supposed that all the responsive machinery must be largely readjusted with them; and directed to some other part of the body. I noticed that Ludo's hands, all the movements of his

limbs, were a surer indication of what he was thinking than was his face.[52]

Again the mind/eye analogy is emphasized, without the eye one is lost perhaps as much as without the mind. The mind's dependence on the eye is proportionately so much more than on any other part of the body that in Ludo we have perhaps the best example of the body-mind dichotomy.

At this point Ludo does not look healthy. Perhaps he is uncomfortable with this unfamiliar foreigner whom he can not see. Despite his later disavowal of intention, Ker-Orr means what he says when he says to the beggar, "Perhaps you have met the Ankou."[53] The choice of the verb 'met' rather than 'seen' is deliberate. There is a bit of the fox in Ker-Orr--unfamiliar alien to the blind man--he proves to be the death-god. Ludo is the only character in The Wild Body who actually dies. Is it because he is eyeless or is it because of Ker-Orr's words? The implications are devastating. Words can be destructive and have always been used as effective weapons of destruction. Ludo's death as many other happenings in Lewis's fiction is surrounded by ambiguities, but I believe Ker-Orr's is the most valid explanation of Ludo's death: he feels that perhaps he has put himself in the position of the Ankou. The satirist, Lewis once observed, is a sort of Cain among craftsmen. In point of fact, Ludo is reduced by his unfortunate and unsought for contact with Ker-Orr to the defenceless humble blind beggar which in truth he is--not the club-waving king commanding tribute--he thought he was. He is

forced into an awareness he cannot live with; in other words, Ludo is a machine without eyes. A departure from the usual rhythm of his life in the form of an unexpected visit spells disaster and death for him. Bestre lives unscathed because he is in possession of a powerful weapon in his observing eye that stands guard over him. In The Wild Body stories, not only has Lewis viewed the body as machine and thus satirized man, but has examined the role of the satirist from various angles.

Franciscan Adventures

Ker-Orr's next victim is Francis, an eccentric vagabond obsessed by his musical talents. His insistence on musical talent amounts to fanaticism. He loves to use musical terms like "pianissimo" and "contralto". He is arrogant about his looks and is pompous about his knowledge of music. According to this eccentric tramp it is the stomach that sings. Ker-Orr cannot resist the temptation to interrogate this shell. Francis is probably his toughest victim. Ker-Orr has to coax and cajole him and say 'Good Day!' to him four times before he can lure him into conversation. He even stoops to flattery: "By God and the Devil and what comes between, you have a voice that is not at all bad."[54] Ker-Orr is full of scorn for this wandering minstrel. He commences to diagnose this queer case. He lures his object into conversation as he might lure a recalcitrant animal. Ker-Orr here emphasizes the function of the Lewisian persona/protagonist as a thinking and

independent mind set amongst semi-mechanical creatures. He lures him with cigarettes and as further bait shows off his clean shirt and bright scarf under his otherwise disreputable clothing. In these the minstrel smells possible free drinks, for he is the eternal tramp. They enter a pub where Ker-Orr proceeds with his observation/dissection:

> I examined this old song-bird with scorn. Monotonous passion, stereotyped into a frenzied machine, he irritated me like an aimlessly howling wind. Had I been sitting with the wind, however, I should not have felt scorn. He was at the same time elemental and silly, that was the reason. What emotions had this automaton experienced before he accepted outcast life? In the rounded personality, known as Father Francis, the answer was neatly engraved. The emotions provoked by the bad, late, topical sentimental songs of Republican France. You could get no closer answer than that, and it accounted completely for him. He had become their disreputable embodiment. In his youth the chlorotic heroine of the popular lyrical fancy must have been his phantom mate. He became her ideal, according to the indications provided by the lying ballad. So he would lose touch more and more with unlyricized reality which would in due course vomit him into the outcast void. That was the likeliest story of this shell I had arrested and attracted in here to inspect.[55]

In his analysis of the Franciscan, Ker-Orr sees the sentimental, the lyrical, the patriotic combined and brought together to form a compulsive and unreal combination of the near mechanical which Lewis did not like but found so fascinating that he continued to examine many such shells in his fiction.

There is a clue in this passage, however, which suggests that the reader is free to formulate his own opinion of any character in The Wild Body. The clue is found in the phrase "the likeliest story" not necessarily the story. Lewis's manipulation of his showman makes it possible for us to look at Ludo the blind man as a regal outcast who is forced

to beg and at several other characters in a kinder light than that in which Ker-Orr sees them.

There is another aspect to Francis's character which is interesting; he sees himself as a giant in a fairy tale. This leads him to fabricate stories about himself to amuse his listeners who, of course, are not fooled. Ffancis is not interested in other people except as listeners and "as illustrations of elementary physics...people mattered for a moment, but without identity."[56] In this attitude he resembles Ker-Orr. Francis is interested in people only as far as they are a means to an end: for him as for Ker-Orr other people are food and drink. For Ker-Orr they are so many dishes to feed the beast of humour in him, in other words, they satisfy his intellectual curiosity. Francis is the archetypal tramp who is quite adept at pretending that he has been robbed whenever he is faced with a bill. People either pay for him or have him ejected from the place.

In this story although Ker-Orr thinks he has isolated the flaw in the Franciscan's armour--a frenzied mechanical lyric sentimentality--he himself is deceived as subsequent developments show. The Franciscan himself has identified an easy prey--the tourist anthropologist fascinated by his own interpretation. Francis in one sense quite literally and deliberately sings for his supper. In one sense he has outfoxed the fox.

At the end of the story Ker-Orr who has withdrawn him-

self from his brief encounter with the Franciscan observes him through a restaurant window. It is an amusing scene in which Francis uses Ker-Orr as Ker-Orr uses other people:

> He was dancing in his heavy sabots, his shoulders drawn up to his ears, arms akimbo. 'I saw an Italian dance this way,' I heard him exclaim. 'It is true! This is the way the Italians dance!' A group of sullen peasants watched him....On noticing me, he began singing a love song, in a loud strong voice. Without interrupting the song, he stretched his hand through the window for a cigarette. There was no recognition in his face while he sang; his lips protruded eloquently in keeping with the sentiment. That is the last I saw of him.[57]

This is one instance in The Wild Body stories in which the victim is the vanquisher. It is almost as though the tables are turned on the satirist. Francis has successfully managed to scrounge food and drink from him, ironically because of Ker-Orr's insatiable interest in specimens such as he is. He forces Ker-Orr to pay for his appetite for laughter without being exposed or dented in any way.

Brotcotnaz

Ker-Orr's final encounter is with the alcoholic Julie, a claret coloured "bloated shell"; who receives regular beatings from her husband Nicholas Brotcotnaz, whose fascination with his wife is religious in the sense Lewis suggests in the essay, "Inferior Religions". "Julie's bruises are the markings upon an idol."[58] Julie is his object of fascination: "He bangs up against it mildly at regular intervals, blackens it, contemplates it, moves round it and dreams. He reverences it, it is his task to kill it."[59] It has been suggested that Brotcotnaz has already battered one wife into the grave; but

the bluebeard aspect of his character is somewhat understated as the sinister aspect of Zohorov's character is in "Beau Sejour". His attitude towards his wife is ambivalent. Between beatings he treats Julie with the tenderest concern. Julie is equally fascinated by her young handsome husband--she is a consenting party. The two act out this ritual many times in a sort of sadomasochistic fashion. They seem to be bound together in a brutal and compulsive relationship, quite often a paradigm of man-woman relationship in Lewisian fiction. In The Art of Being Ruled, Lewis says, "Many animals whose lot it is to be eaten are probably willingly eaten... when the male of the epira is devoured by its mate in midst of tumescence, that is part of the fun."[60] Julie and Brotcotnaz have an enigmatically brutal relationship.

Brotcotnaz and Julie keep an inn at which Ker-Orr has often stayed and where he visits them from time to time. It is easy to see why. They are puppets serving a fanaticism as fantastic as any or as his own. The couple is engaged in a sex-war; a kind of class war, a power game, which interested Lewis tremendously. Ker-Orr however, describes them objectively and casually. Julie's battered face arouses no emotion or pity in the reader. In point of fact, we laugh because Julie gives her bruised condition the fancy name Erysipelas (an acute infectious disease of the skin caused by streptococcus). Her bandaged visage disguises the wounds incurred in a sex war. She seeks solace in liquor; but she likes both:

the beating and the bottle. She tries to keep both secrets but Ker-Orr snatches both of them from her. She resents him for it. She does not say so. In fact there is not much dialogue in the stories, as I have already noticed. It is amazing how much is realized through active detail. The external method is supremely eloquent in Lewis's hands:

> I pretended to snatch first one, then the other. She looked at me and saw that I was not serious. She was silent in the way a child is: she just silently looked at me with a primitive coquetry of reproach, and turned her side to me.--Underneath the counter on the left hand of a person behind it was the bottle of eau-de-vie. When everyone else had gone...she approached the bottle on tiptoe, poured herself out several glasses in succession, which she drank with little sighs.... That was the first secret. I had ravished it impetuously.... Her second secret was the periodic beatings of Brotcotnaz. They were of very great severity....Julie was bandaged and could hardly limp downstairs. That was the erysipelas....I just thought I would stroke the second of them when I approached my hand to her bandaged face.[61]

The passage does not only reveal Julie's character but also shows how Ker-Orr delights in this puppet's plight.

Brotcotnaz makes his appearance on the scene "with an easy, dainty and rapid tread, with a coquettishly supple giving of the knees at each step, and a gentle debonair oscillation of the massive head,..."[62] These few words sum up the charming machine-body of the tall heavily-built man who is the very picture of contentment and luxury in the sheer act of living. The dance in Lewisian fiction as I have said is always revelatory. Ker-Orr recalls an occasion on which he had seen Brotcotnaz dance:

The dimensions of his eyes, and their oily suffusion with smiling-cream, or with some luminous jelly that seems still further to magnify them, are very remarkable. They are great tender mocking eyes that express the coquetry and contentment of animal fats....The tread of this timid giant is softer than a nun's--the supple quick-giving at the knees at each step that I have described is the result no doubt of his fondness for the dance, in which he was so rapid, expert and resourceful in his youth...Brotcotnaz heard the music and drummed upon the table. Then lightly springing up he danced in his tight-fitting black clothes a finicky horn pipe, in the middle of the debit. His red head was balanced in the air, face downwards, his arms went up alternatively over his head, while he watched his feet like a dainty cat, placing them lightly and quickly here and there, with a ceremonial tenderness, and then snatching them away.[63]

There is a design inherent in the passage which emphasizes the combination of the animal and the mechanical in this puppet. His eyes content with animal fats, face, red head, arms, knees and feet are separately scrutinized in their movements as though they were all parts of a rhythmical moving machine. The graceful movements of the dance itself glorify the wild body. During Ker-Orr's present visit he invites Julie to dance with him. It is almost a command which she meekly obeys:

Shedding shamefaced, pinched, and snuffling grins to right and left as she allowed herself to be drawn into this event, she rose. They danced a sort of minuet for me, advancing and retreating, curtseying and posturing, shuffling rapidly their feet. Julie did her part, it seemed, with understanding. With the same smile, at the same pitch, he resumed his seat in front of me.[64]

They are clinched in a ritualistic pattern. One thing clearly emerges. Brotcotnaz may be a smiling villain but Julie did her part with understanding. The erotic as an instrument of aggression finds one of its clearest expressions here.

On Ker-Orr's next visit, the tables are turned. Julie

is more battered and disfigured than ever, but this time her husband is not the cause. The effect is the same, but the cause is an accident. She has been run over by a cart. She is too badly mauled for Brotcotnaz to beat her any more. This accident by breaking the pattern for Nicholas shocks him into a fit of jealousy. Fate had acted without him. He is no longer Julie's fate. He is completely crushed. Julie, on the other hand, is triumphant. She need never hide her bottle again. The sub-dominant in this brutal relationship becomes the dominant. Whatever the upshot of the accident, things for the masterful Nicholas will never be the same again. This is another result of the body's servility to the mechanical rhythm of an inferior religion. Once the rhythm breaks, the machine then cannot re-adjust or re-wind itself unless the mind is there to take command. For Nicholas, "the disorder, the emptiness that had declared itself in his mind would remain."[65]

These stories illustrate the fascinating imbecility of the men-machines seen through Ker-Orr's sensibility which is pre-directed to see the wild body as an entity separated from the mind, obsessed by one or more objects, engaged and moving primitively, rhythmically and automatically in a savage worship. Such behavior according to Lewis is characteristic of the mindless masses who make up our routine society. Individually these machines are harmless enough; but collectively--Lewis insists on collective stupidity in

Rotting Hill--they suggest an insect congregation, which may become a devastating mechanical extension of power in the hands of a charismatic leader.

In the last two stories in The Wild Body the showman is dropped. Lewis has receded from the stories. He is a non-participant, an omniscient narrator. The geographical setting is no longer rural but urban. Also the stories are set in England not in Spanish Galicia or Brittany; nevertheless the characters belong to the same category of men-machines to which the characters described by Ker-Orr belong.

Sigismund

This story is a rich concentrated satire on county society and the mysterious sciences of astrology and palmistry. Sigismund qualifies to perfection as a specimen of religious fanaticism. He worships the blue-blooded aristocracy of England. He is equally enthusiastic (in the eighteenth century sense of the word) about pedigree in dogs. His refusal to see any ugliness in his obscene bulldog is totally absurd:

> But he was a bulldog. His forbears had done romantic things. They had fixed their teeth in the noses of bulls. Sigismund was very proud of him. He insisted that the blood of Rosa flowed in his veins. All Sigismund's friends thumped and fingered him, saying what a splendid dog he was. To see Sigismund going down the road with Pym, you would say, from the dashing shambles of his gait, that he was bound for the old conduit Fields or the Westminster Pit.[66]

Sigismund's relationship with his ugly possession comes to an end when he falls for a deep-chested disc-faced lady whose

pedigree is superior to Pym's. He woos her and wins her. But he has to give up his dog if he wants to wed the lady since the dog had dared to fix its teeth in her eighteenth-century bottom on one occasion.

Honourable Deborah Libyon-Bosselwood is her name. Characteristically her last name is hyphenated. Sigismund when he becomes the proud possessor of such a personage immediately grows curious about the lines on her hand. Deborah has been described by the author in animal terms. Her description is so grotesque that sometimes it exceeds the norm of caricaturistic exaggeration. Deborah is no longer a woman; she is an animal. For example, when Sigismund oils her palms to take the print of the lines and puts them on a sheet of wax, he discovers that she has hair even on the palms of her hands:

> But alas, the Libyon hairiness had invaded even the usually bald area of the inside of the hand. And when Sigismund tried to pull her hand off the wax, Deborah screamed. She had not at all understood or relished his proceedings up to this point. And now that, adhering by these few superfluous hairs to the inadequately heated wax, she felt convinced of the malevolence of his designs, she gave him such a harsh buffet with her free hand that he fell at full length at her feet, a sound shaken from him that was half surprise and half apology. He soon recovered and rushed to fetch a pair of scissors, and snipped her hand free of the wax cast. His bride scowled at him, but the next moment bit his ear and attempted to nestle, to show that he was forgiven.[67]

She is a gorilla. Her ear nibbling is obviously an invitation to mate. But the obsessed protagonist is not interested. All he is interested in is her aristocratic descent and the lines on her palm:

The imminence of her brown breasts was hidden to him. They were almost as remote as the furniture of the Milky Way. Enormous mounts he saw them as (but of less significance than) those diminutive ones of Saturn or the Sun at the base of her fingers....The mount of Venus, for him was to be sought on the base of the thumb and nowhere else. The certain interest he felt for her person, heavy with the very substance of Race, that made it like a palpitating relic, was due really to the element of reference that lay in every form of which it was composed, to the clear indications of destiny that enlivened to such a degree the leathery cutis of her palm. Her jawbone ...meant so many mitigations or confirmations of the Via Lasciva or her very 'open' line of head. Surely the venustal pulp of her thumb, the shape of a leg of mutton, had a more erotic significance than any vulgar desiderata of the bust or the belly? The desmoid bed of her great lines of Race...was a more suitable area for the discreet appearance of such sex aims as those of Sigismund....It had been almost a point of honour with him not to ravish the secrets of her hand till now ....But now occured one of the most substantial shocks of Sigismund's career. Deborah's palm was almost without lines of any sort...It was the health sheet of a bullock, not the flamboyant history of a lady descended from armoured pirates.[68]

Sigismund is a eunuch or maybe he has sublimated his sexual drive into a passion for race and the occult. Ironically he is deprived of the only nuptial bliss he ever had entertained in his mind. The narrative emphasizes Deborah's animalness; not her aristocratic descent, which is Sigismund's obsession. He has married an empty sinisterly starred, well-fed snoring hand.

So he does the second best thing; he shows her off just as he had showed off Pym. He collects bosom buddies who come to look at Deborah as if she were an odd animal in a zoo. Deborah is confused and she begins to feel unreal; but what really enrages her is Sigismund's final madness which is collecting old paintings. In this area, once again he exhibits very poor taste.

Deborah, despite her apparently sub-human intelligence

is not too stupid to realize that sterling pounds are being squandered. Deborah goes into action. She conspires with a lordly cousin and has Sigismund committed to an asylum. Deborah finds herself in jail soon after as the result of pushing her maid down the stairs to her death. The author gives cause for some satisfaction to Sigismund who really is rather naive. Deborah's fate convinces him "that was what the two islands [on her palm] meant: and that that was also the signification of the star upon Jupiter."[69] The mode is comic but the end is tragic. This story is like a black comedy. Sigismund is a grotesque machine body who ends up in an asylum as punishment for his chosen obsession.

You Broke My Dream

This story is a satire on experimentation with time and on some simple types of everyday life--a painter and a couple of waitresses. Will Blood is the name of the man-machine whose unrealistic pretensions are that he is a highly talented painter and a rare human being. He too is severely caricaturized: "Its ['Will Blood's sleeping head] hook nose purrs, its mouth emits regularly the last participle of the French irregular verb 'pouvoir', as though training for an exam. The puckered lids give the eye-sockets a look of dutiful mirth."[70] The machine imagery is extended by the use of words such as 'sockets' and 'hooks'. Will Blood stinks not like an animal, "his smell is far from a thing of beauty but is more appropriate to a vegetable."[71] These words emphasize this

puppet's stupidity and thinghood. In his dreams he sees himself as an anteater, which has no relevance whatsoever to the later development in the story.

Will Blood goes for his breakfast to an ABC cafeteria. He flirts with May, a waitress and tells her that she is like a harem beauty and he is her eunuch when she interrupts him with the words "Fancy goes a long way as Nancy said when she kissed the cow."[72] The willful Will Blood is visibly startled by these words and ecstatic at the same time; he behaves like Archimedes who got out of his tub in naked glory shouting "Eureka!" He utters the word 'cow' with great wonder and awe, and then says rather incoherently the words, "You broke my dream" four times.[73] He records one dream in his diary and describes quite another in a letter to Mr. Dunne. He writes him that he had dreamt of two dappled cows one of whom he kissed in his dream before the morning of his visit to the ABC. He relates how he was startled by the words of the waitress. The words are of course an old country saying. But this accidental utterance strikes the hero as very significant. He ends his letter with the following paragraph:

> For the accuracy of this statement I am prepared to vouch. Time is vindicated! I offer you my warmest congratulations. It is certain that in our dreams the future is available for the least of us. Time <u>is</u> the reality. It is fixed as fixed. Past, Present and Future is a territory over which what we call I crawls, and in its dreams it goes backwards and forwards at will.[74]

The tone is that of a parody of a profound statement. The content is equally ridiculous. On very flimsy evidence Will

Blood the painter begins to see a connection between time and dreams in an absurd way. Comic absurdity is of the same nature as that of dreams; there is an inversion of logic. Thus we see that Will Blood is so fascinated by Dunne's time - theory that he sees it operating everywhere. In this case we see yet another inferior religion operating; namely, man's enslavement to ideas and theories.

In the essay "Inferior Religions" Lewis says about the characters in The Wild Body:

> They are not creations but puppets. You can be as exterior to them, and live their life as little as the showman grasping from beneath and working about a Polichinelle. They are only shadows of energy, not living beings. Their mechanism is a logical structure and they are nothing but that.[75]

In this succint statement Lewis sums up the machine-like puppet-like nature of the human beings who are the objects of his attention in The Wild Body. The metaphor of the puppet show is well realized in the stories. It can be further extended to the relationship between the showman-author and the reader. The showman can be seen by the reader as the Punchinello. On the intellectual level he can be amused and perhaps learn to observe himself in the same detached light. These puppets are the shadows of the great energy which can be called mind or intellect, not complete, living human beings by themselves. Without the conscious operation and cooperation of the mind the body is nothing but an absurd machine automatically obeying the rhythm of some obsession, some inferior religion. Thus the body-mind dichotomy has been effectively

used as an instrumental concept in satirizing the man-machine through description of externals which appear divorced from the mind.

CHAPTER THREE

ROTTING HILL: THE ROT

Background

The stories in Rotting Hill are vastly different both in technique and subject matter from those in The Wild Body. The sunny atmosphere is gone. The technique is that of journalistic commentary rather than the experimental and novel manipulation of language that the reader encounters in The Wild Body stories. Written nearly thirty years later, the stories are openly concerned with the human condition in the context of bad times shortly after World War II. In August 1945 Lewis returned to London from America. The war had drained the Great Empire's resources. The once Great Britain was reduced to a mini-Britain. The government had nationalized coal, steel and even health. Ration was fashion. Lewis's personal reponse to these changes in the country is recorded in these stories. The point that strikes me the most is that even when Lewis gives expression to a great many of his political preoccupations, he has not become a professional protester; he is still a professional satirist. The difference

is that the joy and laughter seen in The Wild Body has gone out of the satire in Rotting Hill stories.

The very first paragraph in the Foreword to Rotting Hill spells out clearly what the stories are about:

> If I write about a hill that is rotting it is because I deplore rot. For the decay of which I write is not romantic decay.... If we exist shabby, ill-fed, loaded with debt...let us recognize that the sole explanation of this is our collective stupidity ....The most recent wars have entirely altered our lives.[1]

The alterations in the quality of human life are examined in the stories and sketches in Rotting Hill. This is why the collection can be classified as historical fiction; only some of the stories are not really fiction at all, the biographical note very obviously enters into them. It seems to me that Lewis is quite adept at turning fact into fiction. He writes with a strong sense of commitment to his environment. He responds to it and diagnoses the malaise of the society and conditions he lives in. The milieu is so concretely realized that one has to overlook the tedious factual data that the author has had--by necessity--to provide. The author admits in a particularly lengthy and somewhat boring story "Parents and Horses":

> All this minutiae, if it can be tolerated provides one with a close-up as it were, which is invaluable for the student but rather irksome for the general reader. I have taken this risk because of the necessity in such a case to provide convincingly factual data. Should we or can we have in the twentieth century a religion?[2]

The question is brilliantly answered:

> Two World Wars in rapid succession have hurried the end of Christianity in England. Socialism as time passes, melting into Communism, will take religion's place in the form of

brotherly millennium--a heaven on earth for good socialist boys and girls, and a hell on earth for the wicked (vide slave camps, salt mines, etc.). In place of Christ there will be men-gods like Stalin and Hitler, a High God being dispensed with. But that is taking the long view: it may be a decade before matters go as far as that. Meanwhile it is difficult to see how Christianity can live, if only for the moment, except by some heroic measure. One that reommends itself to me, is that all churches, vicarages bishop's palaces, etc., be closed.[3]

While there is much provocative food for thought and much prophetic vision (for example the name of Mao Se-Tung in China as a Man-God can be added to the names Lewis mentions) it should be noted that it is not always the characters who speak for themselves. The point is that there is much authorial comment. The 'I' of the author is more prominent than his 'eye'.

The prominently autobiographical tone, however, does not mean that all the stories fail to objectify Lewis's response to the times because of the strong presence and occupation of centre stage by the author. Some of the stories are good examples of how Lewis can turn actual events to his own creative purposes. To give just one example of the many characters he knew and used in his stories, Lewis wrote in a letter to Mr. White:

...the original of "The Bishop's Fool" was up in town a few days ago. He read my "Rude Assignment"...He remarked how 'violent' was my writing, how 'gentle' I was myself. Of course I protested about the violence, and he explained that all truth was violent.[4]

Lewis's letters to his friends at the time of the writing of Rotting Hill stories express the same annoyance and discontent with the state of affairs in London as the stories

do. I quote from a letter written to Augustus John, dated 17th August, 1948:

> Before World War II I could manage to live. At Whiteley's I could buy excellent French wine for 2/9 or 3/- a bottle, quite drinkable for less. Once I had a superb brandy for far less than the cost of half a bottle of gin today. A good shirt could be 10/- or 12/-: but I need not recall in detail ....I could live like a prince without great expense....But 100 pounds is in fact only 30 or 40 pounds....What I do is to eliminate every expenditure outside of food and cigarettes and the odd bottle of gin, and I shall wear the clothes I have until they drop off my back.[5]

Another quotation from a letter to Gene Nash, dated March 7, 1949, is also relevant:

> A pack of cigarettes for instance is 3 1/2 times as much as 10 years ago: a lot of that is what is called "purchase tax": namely a government rake-off. In this way everything is taxed (up to 100 percent) from a lead pencil to an automobile ...our government refused to buy meat from Ireland...so Ireland sells its meat to Holland for half as much...Holland cans this meat, and the next thing is that it is being sold in English shops for an extravagant price....This of course is a direct criticism of the government's poor business sense ....Again, a concentration on the welfare of the coal heaver and the dustman means that what once was the middle class is discriminated against and must soon disappear....If I could emigrate I would: <u>for I am not interested in politics</u>....[6]

I have underlined the last words, for I truly believe in them. Quite paradoxically they are true. Lewis talks about politics a great deal because they affect the human condition; but he is not involved with any 'ism' and supports no political programme. Evidence of this fact is found not only in <u>Rotting Hill</u> but in many of his writings. He examines all systems but does not commit himself to any:

> I am neither an enthusiastic capitalist nor communist: but I do believe that one of those choices must be made.--Such judgements are in another category altogether to philosophical or literary judgements, that is my point....there are no good politics. All nations are brutes. What is more, they brutalize

us: we are born nice but gradually we develop a bad character. This is largely because of the bad example set us by the state.[7]

Political comments however abound in the Rotting Hill stories. Quite a few of them become debates since political ideas have been put into the mouths of the characters. "The Talking Shop" and "My Fellow Traveller to Oxford" are good examples of these debates. In "The Talking Shop" Lewis describes a visit to the Parliament where his host brings up the subject of the Atom bomb. In terms of the ever present threat of total annihilation of the world Lewis's observation is succint and valuable. "It is the fatalism ensuing upon consciousness of a power so overwhelming that it makes nonsense of the old humanistic values."[8] The rotten fossil-structure of the old systems will not be able to cope with it. All problems are trivial in view of Atomic Absolutism. John Harrison in his essay on Lewis in his book The Reactionaries suggests that Lewis became aware of the fact that-

> It was no longer democratic society, or mass advertising, or Bergson's philosophy that made conditions bad for art. It was the atom bomb, and the effect which the probability of universal disaster had on the human psyche.[9]

In the debate with his fellow-traveller to Oxford triggered by the newly formulated Human Rights, Lewis sees the danger of the entire society losing political rights and freedom and acquiring slave ones instead, as he says to his fellow-traveller:

> Remove these rights from me which are called political, and I certainly should not be consoled by being tucked in bed every night by a state nurse, given perpetual employment; being examined weekly free of charge by a state doctor and a state

dentist, given state pills and state teeth, and finally by being buried in a state-grave. Those by themselves are slave-rights. The man who barters his liberty for a set of false teeth and a pair of rimless spectacles is a fool.[10]

In the Foreword, talking about socialism as something that was happening in the post-World War II England, Lewis says, "In the present work, there is, however, one factor specially stressed; namely socialism seen as a final product of bible-religion."[11] Socialism, indeed, may be the natural result of the Christian impulse which always mobilizes itself towards improving the condition of the underdog. The point is that the stories in Rotting Hill are also vehicles for political debate.

The stories are set in this background of the post-World War II England: economic deterioration; poor services offered by the nationalized industries; changing attitudes towards religion; a shift towards the left politically; a change in social structure; an ever present threat of annihilation from the Bomb; and bad conditions for art--a combination that seems painful and hopeless to the author of Rotting Hill. The characters are obsessed with these questions and issues that are all unmistakably related to politics. The background, then, can be defined as political. Lewis justifies the political content in Rotting Hill with these words:

> "Is this a political book?" Not more it can truthfully be answered than some of Charles Dickens' books and all Mr. Shaw, to go no further afield. If my characters are obsessed by politics, it is because today our lives are saturated with them. It is impossible for a work of narrative fiction worth reading to contain less politics than Rotting Hill.[12]

What is happening to lives saturated with politics, is described and fictionalized vividly and forcefully through the use of the metaphor of rot. The stories are held together by an overwhelming sense of the rot. Like The Wild Body collection the Rotting Hill stories too, submit themselves to a central design. In these the design is created by the emphatic and persistent reference to the presence of rot in every aspect of human life during the late forties in London.

The Rot

Lewis in his manipulation of the metaphor of rot, moves from the particular to the general, from the concrete to the abstract. He employs the functional, organic and structural metaphor of rot to project not only the image of post-World War II London but a complex of thought and feeling so subtle and precise that the picture of London becomes that of the war-torn world. The vision becomes universal:

> That there was much rotting of the spirit in this blistering period, of what we pretentiously term history, was not hidden from me exactly. But I must confess that it was with surprise that, resting my hand carelessly upon a windowsill at one apartment, I found my nails sinking into the wood. The wood in our flat had up till then behaved on all occasions like wood. It was a week later...my finger plunged into the wood of a door. These were my first contacts with the rot.[13]

This is the opening paragraph of the piece entitled "The Rot" in which Lewis describes his harrowing contacts with the rot. These contacts would have been comical if they had not suggested the"rotting of the spirit" and the rotting of all things living and otherwise. Wood is an easy target for the galloping

rot "since it belongs to the living order".[14]

Lewis's microscopic examination of the rot in London beginning with an examination of the woodwork in his own apartment extending to the rot in consumer goods, the rot in workings of the government and even to the rot in the clergyman's cloth is detailed and thorough. Laming, the clergyman in the story "Parents and Horses" is shabbily dressed and is perpetually trying to conceal a hole in the sleeve of his shirt. His poverty is a manifestation of rot. Rymer, another clergyman in the story "The Bishop's Fool" receives five shillings a week and is almost always dressed in rags; Lewis says of him:

> He is one of the first English clergymen to stand for poverty and want. And as he moves around from house to house, the doors quickly shut at his approach as if he were infected with some complaint which no one was particularly anxious to have; and out of rags tacked together his "Oxford accent" issues with incongruous patronage; his encyclopaedic affectations exasperate, his great-heartedness abashes--for there is no cash only credit in Heaven, the currency of religion, no longer legal tender. The majority of the shop keepers and labourers' wives of Bagwick have given up "the opiate of the people", they are no longer addicts.[15]

The rot has entered the faith of the people via their greed for cash. Religion itself seems to have rotted; it is no longer negotiable. Human values have deteriorated.

Mr. Chapman has discussed Rotting Hill in a chapter entitled "The Horrors of Peace".[16] It is an admirably suitable heading; for Lewis has catalogued exactly what might be seen as horrors of peace in the fictional and quasi-fictional pieces brought together in Rotting Hill. The picture of

"atomic politics, national bankruptcy, murderous taxation, black market immunity, jobbery, world inflation, population drained of hope"[17] comes alive through Lewis's perception of rot in the life in post-war London.

To begin with the title "Rotting Hill" which rhymes with Notting-Hill,the district in which Lewis lived at the time, according to Lewis was borrowed from "a friend in Washington".[18] The friend was Ezra Pound who suggested this name in response to a letter from Lewis. This is an excerpt from Lewis's letter:

...it will not surprise you to learn therefore that one of John Bull's houses--the one in which I dwell--is dropping to pieces, afflicted with a disease known as "dry rot"....workmen were already engaged upon dry rot cases in other parts of the building. As a consequence for many weeks we have lived upstairs...yesterday we came downstairs: the workmen now go upstairs, where dry rot abounds.[19]

The description in "The Rot" of Lewis's post-war experience in London is a close parallel to the passage from his letter to Pound.[20] The title "Rotting Hill", apart from being suitably satirical, evokes the picture of a barren hill with garbage carelessly heaped at its base. The rot has to begin with, manifested itself in the woodwork of the houses during the two wars. The Rotting-Hillers are plagued by the crumbling wood, and their privacy is regularly violated, their peace shattered most noisily by hordes of workmen. The workmen seem to enjoy their work hugely. They seem to look upon it as a symbol of a class war which they are able to declare upon the now greatly impoverished middle and upper classes whom they

imitate and hate. Lewis sees in their behaviour a pathetic manifestation of a token class war. What adds a deeper perspective to the description of the author's ordeal with rot is the fact that the workmen like other men do not recognize the rot in themselves. The author feels that the wood is not the only organic form of life that has been attacked by the rot. Rot and the people are identified:

> We and the rot were one, we were involved as if we had been wood. Was it not our rot? The rot existed for us. If there was a fungus here instead of the wood which honest workmen forty years before lifted into place, we had produced the fungus--an emanation of social decay. Were it eventually necessary to pull down the house, we ought to be demolished with it.[21]

Lewis emphasizes collective responsibility as he does "collective stupidity".

Lewis recognizes signs of decay and deterioration within himself too. He sees himself through the eyes of a Cockney carpenter who is the rot specialist of the building:

> ...I recalled the humped humanity that shuffled off, cool and relaxed, when he found I was a no-person....Actually I was worse as he saw it than the rotten, in and out of whose residences he moved with such a dark satisfaction. I belonged to the rot--to a rotted social class: was tenant in a building rotted down to its cellars, lived after an outmoded pattern (a "blooming artist")-rotted and was answerable for rot--rot which began to hem me in, madly nourished by my antidiluvian life-habits.[22]

The passage exhibits understanding of the human condition in its various aspects of decay. Lewis is conscious of his decreasing vigour and irrelevance as an artist at that particular point in time. Perhaps he is also conscious of his failing physical abilities, chiefly his eyesight. The passage

rings with self-reproach; also it accepts the fact of the rot which destroys human vitality and limits a human being. In a totally different context (in the event of necessity to submit to an eye operation) he wrote in a letter to Meyrick Booth, "But it is after all the kind of thing one has to expect if one allows oneself to be born. Had I been a suitably obstreperous foetus all this could have been avoided."[23] The living have to endure their rot: the rot in their bodies, rot in their spirits, rot in their dwellings and rot in the things they are surrounded by and consume. While the de-rotting of his residence is being conducted Lewis almost accepts what he imagines the carpenter to be conveying to him, "You can keep your rotten wood, Mr. Lewis! You are the dry rot we are after!"[24]

"Time the Tiger" is one of the two stories--the other is "A Room Without a Telephone"--in which Lewis has been able to objectify his responses to the unfamiliar environment of post-war London. Lewis is not present in them as a first person singular. It is in "Time the Tiger" that the metaphor of rot extends over consumer goods; moves form the outside concrete circumstances into the very hearts of Mark and Charles, two childhood friends. The rot creeps into their relationship and destroys it. The story begins with images of the bowels which make London seem wasted and grey. "The sky was a constipated mass, yellowed by the fog, suspended over a city awaiting the Deluge."[25] Mark, the hero, is in

tune with the weather. The immediate cause of his depression is the breakfast he must eat:

> Why were his loaves the least white, the grayest of any in Rotting Hill?...His bread became as hard as a brick within forty-eight hours. It became like that in the stomach too if you failed to expel it promptly.26

Along with the bread he has to saw off for the purpose of slicing, he has to share some "alleged Darjeeling" and "pseudo Ceylon" tea with his friend Charles. Carrot pulp masquerades as strawberry jam. Sugar, milk and eggs are scarce unless bought in the black market.

Mark, however, does not feel depressed only because of the rotten quality of the food; for the rot has affected almost all the daily consumer needs of life. He has to struggle to get into a shirt that has shrunken out of all proportion. Even the buttonholes are now too small for the buttons. The quality of his jacket has deteriorated too. The once famous British tweed looks ugly and vulgar. He has to struggle to tie his shoelaces. Finally he gives up and resigns himself to making just one loop. Getting dressed is an ordeal. It is a metaphor for the ordeal life has become in the post-World War II London.

Lewis cannot buy toothpaste tubes with caps that fit. Rot attacks the mechanical perfection of nail scissors. Mr. Patricks of "Mr. Patrick's Toy Shop" admits the inferiority of the toys in his shop and complains they are rotten. Lewis says, "His Yorkshire accent broke rot-ten most expressively into two autonomous vocables charged with disgust."27

Sheffield goods which were considered the best in the world are no longer of the impeccable quality of the past. There is a pronounced deterioration in the work ethic of the labouring class who themselves are not free from the disease of rot. Mr. Patricks is quite willing to sell American toothpaste (caps fit the tubes) and superior quality French nail scissors under the counter. His rotten toys sell like "hot cakes". In short, all is rotten in the state of England; and Rotting-Hillers accept this state of affairs. All they do is grumble. Lewis says in the Foreword:

> For the seamy side of Socialist splendour the Socialists are blamed. Mr. Patricks...says his customers even blame the heat and the cold...on the Government. And then, of course, the very bounty of the socialists, their lavish honey-moon spending, militated against the austerity of life and dedication to work which was required to build the New Jerusalem.... the ingrained habit of go-slow, producing a population of the laziest workmen...has proved the arch-enemy of socialism. So there is a big cancer, a deep rot in the heart of industry now controlled by the new masters, which it may require a very harsh dictator to eradicate.[28]

So it is not only the workmen's rot but their socialist masters' rot that is responsible for the deterioration in manufactured goods.

Under the system of socialized medicine against which Lewis has repeatedly harangued in Rotting Hill, Charles in "Time the Tiger" cannot get his bi-focals for three months. The unheated room where Mark goes to donate his blood (no doubt, to socialism) is so cold that his blood refuses to flow. The utter disregard for filth and sepsis seems to spell rot. The doctor's coat is dirty. No one cares in Rotting Hill in

the year 1947. The painful sight of the old women hobbling on the sidewalks is a testimony to deteriorated health. The war-rot had got into their poor joints. The Harley Street practitioners themselves are dismissed as profiteering quacks in "The Room Without a Telephone". In the story "The Rebellious Patient" (Shenandoah, 1953) there is an interesting narrative of a patient who turns the tables on such a profiteering quack by refusing to be the victim of an unethical practice which thrives on the weaknesses of rich hypochondriacs. National Health doctors are merely clerks and druggists who hand out prescriptions by the number. Rot is siphoning away the human touch from medical practice.

Dr. Eldred in "The Room Without a Telephone" has to admit himself to a nursing home for the extraction of his rotten teeth. Much against his wishes he is made to leave his room because a queue of sick people are waiting for it. The case does not seem particular. One has a vivid perception of a London full of queues of the sick and the dying, waiting outside busy hospitals. It is not easy in the utilitarian England of 1950 to find a place to die in, outside of the poor house "...there is an overplus of invalids of both sexes, but mostly women"[29] The cruelty, indifference, inefficiency, rottenness of the whole medical set is vividly portrayed. In Lewis's Rotting Hill the collectivist welfare state and its ethos are analyzed.

The ramifications of such a collectivist welfare state

can be dangerous and insidious in other ways. If access to quality medical treatment can be in danger, the right to free movement can also be in danger. In the sketch "My Fellow Traveller to Oxford" Lewis sees London as a prison house:

> Once it had been possible to buy a ticket for anywhere in the world: shades of the prison house were gathering deeply about us in these islands. Today I could go down to the station, buy a ticket and go to Penzance or to John O'Groats--quite a big prison yard to exercise in, as a matter of fact I seldom went further than a hundred miles. But I could not go to Calais or Bologne. Tomorrow it might be I should have to secure a permit to travel to Oxford. I should then be walking around and around in Rotting Hill.30

The pre-war social relationships are not immune from the corrosion brought on by the war-rot. They are falling apart. An example of this kind of disintegration is contained in "Time the Tiger". Mark Robins, the hero has a very good relationship with Charles Dyat and his sister Ida. In point of fact he thinks of Ida as a romantic and beautiful image of timelessness and often dreams about her. The beginnings of the rift between Mark and Charles can be discerned in their diametrically opposite attitudes toward the new Socialist government. Charles wants no part of the new austerity; he believes in resorting to bribes and any other shady devices to get all the creature comforts he can get. Mark finds this attitude outrageously corrupt and tries to persuade Charles to see the good points in the new Labour government but it is no use:

> "Of course I go around oiling palms," he [Charles] began aggressively. "Your masters don't need to--they have their farms like Stalin's commissars and their privileges...you can't live on one rationbook without tipping. Tipping is the black market of the poor."

Mark no longer hesitated to recognize the political gulf which yawned and gaped between them.[31]

Mark, however, still tries to respond with an earnest defence of the new government; but Charles does not reconcile himself to controls, rations and the tasteless tea. In utter despair Mark says:

"Charles, you are hopeless,"...--in a tone in which a doctor would wind up, "and I fear it is malignant."

"Incurable. I am chronically sick of the present government."[32]

From the debate over the methods of the new Government it becomes obvious that Mark was not a socialist to begin with but was reborn a socialist after the war out of a changed political climate. "Time the Tiger" is the name of the existentialist film they go to see together. This film provides the occasion for an extension of the argument between the two friends about the immediate effects of the socialistic pattern and its consequent harassments into a philosophic discussion. Mark's inclination is to replace the image of time the tiger, the devourer with a less dramatic one but Charles poses a question:

"Do you think Time is a tiger, a ferocious beast of prey?"
...Mark shook his head.

"No," he said magisterially, "nothing forcible and palpable like that. More like the bacteria of a disease."[33]

The last three words in this piece of conversation recall the rot in the wood. Thus they extend the metaphor of rot to the change the element of time can cause in human relationships. Indeed, the bacteria rots and destroys completely the rela-

tionship at a lunch the two friends have with Ida in a restaurant. Ida sides with her brother. In point of fact, she is more fierce than her brother in her condemnation of the Socialist government of vermin. The good times that these childhood friends had are destroyed forever by the rot that ineffectual complaint and compromise has introduced--in the shape of dissent and clash of interests. They no longer "have the clean sensation the non-political have".[34] Ida and Charles insult Bevan and the Socialists. Ida approves of her brother's black-marketing and thinks it far superior to Mark's working for the government. There are hot words; Mark is still groping between the two worlds while Charles sees quite clearly:

> "Three old friends," he croaked, who stopped to look at the Sodom and Gomorrah of the Future--and they all three are turned to salt!"[35]

The group cannot come to flesh and blood again as people of 1929 could not come back to 1950 just as they were. A definite 'finis' is written to the beautiful personal relationship that once was. Mark starts correspondence with a pretty party-woman and stops it with Charles, at the same time he banishes the romantic sex-image of Ida from his mind forever.

In Rotting Hill Lewis sees the people as a public whose very will has rotted:

> ...whose reactions are so jaded that it has sunk almost to coolie levels. The English had a public conscience as big as a house. But its fibre is devoured. It is completely rotted.[36]

It is not only in the English as a human group that he finds

rot. He finds the all-pervasive rot in all human groups that are but raw material in the hands of politicians and technology. This is how the metaphor of rot is in a sense centrifugal and thus becomes an earth-embracing metaphor:

> The business of the stories and sketches of which this book is composed is, first, the life of the Hill, of Rotting Hill. You must always supply, in your imagination, the jaded bustle of this key locality...over-crowded polyglot hill. Next is the big background of the city, which swells around the hill. Beyond that the rest of the earth--full of sub-machine guns and atomic bombs, the grasping Yankee and the treacherous Israelite, the Russian Bear and the French Frog: an earth covered with Iron Curtains and other nightmarish features.[37]

The passage is an admirable metaphor for the world--not for just the world of the late forties--for the present day world too, since the "nightmarish features" described and implied in the passage have not disappeared. In point of fact, they have multiplied. The metaphor of rot is more than relevant; it is universal and prophetic.

The last piece called "Rot Camp" is appropriately termed "Envoi": the word means explanatory, commendatory remarks to a book; in poetry it means a short, fixed and final stanza pointing the moral. It also means a parting word that rings with frustration and defeat. "Rot Camp" as the final piece in this collection rings with frustration and defeat apart from emphasizing the metaphor of rot. It also reinforces, the tone like a dirge, the gloom of the entire book. Lewis gives the name "Rot Camp" to the Fun Fair of Rotting Hill. Located in the same area is the Catherine Wheel bar frequented by Roy Campbell and Augustus John. Rotting-Hillers

visit the place in the hope of diversion and blissful alcohol-induced oblivion. There are targets on the hill representing Hitler, Hirohito, Mussolini, all villains of World War II. Lewis's statement to Mr. Stupid of the Hill strengthens his claim that he is detached from any particular political ideology. It also expresses his humanitarian disgust with the enemies of the people, "I take a pot at all mass-murderers, whether sanctimoniously democratic, 'heroically' military, or blood-thirstily proletarian."[38]

Lewis's conversation with Arthur places further emphasis on the metaphor of rot. In point of fact, reference to rot functions in much the same way as an oft repeated line in a poem, throughout the book:

> "'Tis a rotting world,"..."I feel I am buzzing through space inside a rotten egg."...
>
> I cannot see Arthur, what you expect of this earth ball. You know it is composed of dung....This is a nasty place, Arthur. Millions of little organisms compete, only the police make them keep their hands off one another....But with nations it is a different matter. There is no police force to restrain them from exterminating their neighbors. I cannot see why you should expect a nation to behave itself better than a man, Arthur.[39]

These words spoken in person by Lewis most certainly ring with frustration and defeat. Also there is the insistence on the relationship between "collective stupidity" and individual cupidity introduced in the Foreword. Nations are people. Wars start in the dark deep recesses of human beings; the rot invades the wood of consciousness. The stories of Rotting Hill project the material world with its ruined rotted society. Lewis portrays a world of man, devoid of all aesthetic and

humanistic values where man is living the life of a rotten shell without vitality, truth, goodness or beauty. Only the vital shell is a living interface. Lewis's manipulation of the metaphor of rot projects a prophetic vision. He seems to foresee in the life of the Hill a future that would be much the same, given the political systems of the times or the systems we are likely to have.

The most devastating and haunting image with which the "Envoi" closes is that of a beggar-woman, a personification of poor old Brittania (on whose empire the sun had not dared to set):

> Once so robust, she was terribly shrunken: some wasting disease, doubtless malignant. The trident now employed as a crutch, she held out a mug for alms. I saw in the mug what looked like a phoney dollar bill, and dropped myself a lucky three penny bit to poor old silly Brittania. In a cracked wheeze she sang "Land of Hope and Glory". I must confess that this last apparition and its vulgar little song rather depressed me.[40]

This is bathos turned in on itself. The caricature with its reference to the "phoney dollar bill" and the Union Jack "employed as a crutch" is also explosively satiric. The writing in Rotting Hill is still satirical but as I suggested at the very beginning of this chapter the joy though not the sharpness has gone out of satire. The image depresses the author and it is depressing to the reader. Twenty-five years later, today, the image still seems valid. Rotting Hill is the greyest of Lewis's fiction. It shows up the rot and offers no hope for its disappearance in the foreseeable future.

The Machine and the Rot

Throughout the stories of Rotting Hill we find that the use of the machine imagery still persists. Rotting-Hillers are referred to as machines; Mark in "Time the Tiger" observes them going to work:

> His eye followed with displeasure the absurdly ominous figures moving under mass-pressure to be there at nine o'clock passing on through the hollow twilit streets towards the swarming undergrounds. It was the urgency that jarred, their will-to-live as a machine.[41]

It is this kind of a crowd that lives like a machine that is desired by the politicians--will-less masses incapable of thinking. "Power does not like to have a bronco beneath it--meaning a violent or a spirited people,"[42] remarks Lewis in the piece called "The Rot". In The Art of Being Ruled Lewis had analyzed the mentality of the masses who were content to demolish, kill or do anything if ordered to:

> For in the mass people wish to be automata: they wish to be conventional; they hate you teaching them or forcing them into freedom: they wish to be obedient, hard working machines, as near dead as possible--as near dead (feelingless and thoughtless) as they can get without actually dying.[43]

In The Wild Body Lewis, along with the use of machine metaphor, makes use of the animal imagery. There are instances of this in Rotting Hill to remind one that the human machine belongs to the living order just as wood does and therefore, is equally subject to rot. Lewis refers to the masses not only as a machine but as an animal; he says to Rymer in "The Bishop's Fool":

> The British working class is the reverse of the socially ambitious: Always it has been the despair of the agitator, a mass

as difficult to ignite as a rainsoaked mackintosh. It has been content to be an animal, fond of beer and football not envious of the well-to-do because it could only be envious in terms of beer and football,...golf fails to stir its impulse.[44]

The working class has been analyzed as a conditioned machine-gang. They obey the ganger cheerfully as they work in their role of "rot-hunters"; they are an extension of their tools. Lewis identifies them with their machines and the machine's mechanical motion:

Eight drills, for instance, each as explosive as a motorbike, were massed in action, blasting down to the eighteen-inch line of specification, and though there was no rushing but concentrated deliberation--of progressive unmaking, layer by layer, and then on remaking, from earth-line to the street-level--the tension of the time-table was felt.[45]

These are the people the politicians like whether left or right, for they want only to keep themselves in power.

Although the crowds in The Wild Body are also machines they are not rotten rusted machines as they are in Rotting Hill. The social machinery has broken down because of the inability of total humanity to deal en masse with the cataclysm brought by the atom bomb and the war-rot. A society at war or after a war is in a state of decay, in the state of a machine that has rotted. Consequently it is no longer functional. Thus the imaginative development of Lewis's metaphor provides the link in the train of thought which moves both reader and writer from the machine body to the examination of rot on a larger scale--spiritual and socio-economic decadence. Also Lewis from The Wild Body moves from an individual point of view to the social point of view. It is not just "the

creaking men-machines" who are examined; it is the kind of society they compose that is examined. All aspects of life are seen as rotten or rotting both literally and figuratively in Rotting Hill.

The view of the human beings as automata postulated in The Wild Body continues to persist in descriptions of individuals in action. Lewis begins the sketch "My Fellow Traveller to Oxford" with these words: "When I entered the train at Paddington Station I was absent-minded--indeed I was an automaton."[46] Mr. Patricks of the Toy Shop has been referred to as a woundup toy. Automation is stressed in the hammering rhythm of the carpenters' work in their de-rotting mission; and in the work of a large team of workers. Only these individuals are rotten as "the rot softens the fibres of the will".[47]

The most representative example of the rotted machine is the Rotting-Hiller:

> On Rotting Hill the rubbish is still collected on Saturdays, but nevertheless the pavements are littered--with Rotting-Hillers. Some get stuck in doorways. I picked one up under a lamp-post the other day and took him up to draw. He sat well, staring blankly at the blankness of my walls. He had practically no will left. Had I boxed his ears--instead of giving him half a crown--he would have wobbled about a little but that is all.[48]

Although the landscape of Rotting Hill is littered with such will-less morons and with people who will accept anything from brick-like loaves of bread to exorbitant taxes, there are survivors from The Wild Body who have inherited the wild bodies and inferior religions which were the centre of Lewis's concern when he wrote the stories collected in The Wild Body.

Gartsides in "My Disciple", Dr. Eldred in "The Room Without a Telephone" and Rymer in "The Bishop's Fool" are the three typical inheritors of "the wild body".

Gartsides' is the truly primitive mind; it should be, as he has been a sergeant in the Indian Army for seventeen years. He has taken a crash course in the methods of teaching art. He gets all but carried away by his little knowledge. He becomes fanatic about taking art to the people. In his enthusiasm to do so he vulgarizes it by encouraging the children to paint the walls of the school with barbaric spontaneity. He wants to see art in the dishes people eat out of, houses people live in and the clothes people wear. He has become a director of art in a technical college. He professes to be a great admirer and disciple of Lewis's and incongruously claims that the days of the easel picture are over. Lewis's horror at this parasite of art is only matched by his consternation that such a person as Gartsides should completely misread his Caliph's Design, Lewis remarks:

> It [The Caliph's Design] is to do with the fine arts, with especial reference to the case of the architect. The human shell, dwelling or public building, should be demolished, I protested, no city should be spared or time wasted, and our architects should construct upon the tabula rasa thus created, a novel, a brilliant city.[49]

Gartsides has misread the message because of his primitive mind and emotional personality. He thinks destroying everything or painting everything willynilly is what Lewis preaches. He is imbecilic. He is guilty of the worst sin of all, I think, in Lewis's eyes, namely vulgarization of art.

Gartsides, however, is not condemned by Lewis as he would have been had he been written about earlier. He would have been verbally chastized as one of the apes of God twenty years before the writing of Rotting Hill. Instead Lewis says:

> But I rather like Mr. Gartsides. I even secretly wished him luck. This remarkable sergeant naturally regarded art as an uproarious racket. In that, however, he was by no means alone. Many dignified gentlemen who draw fat salaries as directors just like Gartsides only on a far bigger scale, regard art precisely the same way. The parasites that art attracts are legion.[50]

Rot has set in the standards of art via this "legion" of which Gartsides whom Lewis satirically calls "My Disciple" is just one member. Gartsides as the wild-body-machine is destructive as he is part of a decadent artless society. He is a pale, sick shadow of the wild body.

Dr. Eldred is a ham historian, a celebrated ruin who suffers from a frantic vanity. He wants to rest on his laurels; he still wants to remain an academic figure of giant intellect in the public eye. He is a has-been whose fear of dropping out of the public eye is absurd. He is obsessed with the idea that people still want to invite him to dinners. To create an illusion of being in public demand he employs a secretary to ward off visitors who do not come and to answer the telephone that does not ring. At the same time he tries to project an image of one who craves seclusion.

Eldred is a wild-body-machine which has rotted intellectually, spiritually and physically. The bodily rot asserts itself in his teeth which really should have been extracted

twenty years ago. When he is admitted into a box-sized room without a telephone in a nursing home, his expression of a sense of relief at the prospect of living in a room without a telephone fools no one.

As just another resident of Rotting Gardens, Dr. Eldred is excellently portrayed by Lewis as the once vital machine that has rotted to the point of being completely ineffective in the post-World War II London. While recuperating after the extraction of his teeth Eldred has an interesting conversation with one of the news reporters. He thinks of reporters as "...a pest, they poison my life with their lives."[51] The reader is as sceptical as the doctor to whom this statement is made. Eldred's conversation with the news-hound is his last bid at gaining the attention of the public which had ignored him. He tells the reporter he wants to renounce the world. The desired result materializes in the headline, "GREAT HISTORIAN TO BECOME A MONK."[52] The story under this headline is sensational too:

> If we are approached in Piccadilly by a gaunt austere figure in the dress of a Franciscan Friar, and solicited for alms, that will be the great historian Dr. Eldred....He can no longer tolerate even that degree of worldly contact; he spurns the comforts of his home in Rotting Gardens--he asserts, indeed, that he is tired of Rotting Hill and of our <u>rotting</u> life as well![53]

At the end of the story, "The Room Without a Telephone", we find that Dr. Eldred reluctantly returns to Rotting Gardens from the nursing home; for it is in the nursing home that he has not had to face the hard fact that his telephone does not

ring. He is a pathetic portrait of the defeated rotted wild body without any vitality.

Rymer in the story "The Bishop's Pool" is the wild body obsessed by the religion of socialism. His fanatic commitment to poverty represents an attitude of extreme romantic sentimentalism in politics. He goes about his parish with dignity in garments literally dropping to pieces. People loathe him for this assertion of dignity amidst poverty. The new-rich farmer is against him. His family resents him because of a life of austerity forced on them by his stubbornness. The family is not allowed to grumble against the shortages as Rymer is all for the new Socialist Government. He is plagued by difficulties from all quarters. To his superiors his ideas and behaviour are suspect as red. He is a Christ figure persecuted by those who fail to understand him. As such he is also a bizarre comic figure. Lewis, after a chance meeting with Rymer at the British Museum, becomes fascinated with him; and refers to him as a mechanical bird. Lewis is compelled to visit this specimen of the wild body in Bagwick where Rymer is the Rector. Lewis's description of Rymer makes him appear a clown, the Bishop's Fool;

> The Rector of Bagwick was the village bum it seemed. In Sweet Auburn ugliest village of the plain they had a scarecrow to preach to them. His attire was terrific. No mendicant friar ever hobbled down a street in a more tatterdemalion advertisement of poverty.[54]

Rymer's romantic worship of socialism leads to severe consequences for him. He alienates himself from his milieu

with his "tatterdemalion" get-up; he also alienates himself from his family:

> Both Eleanor and son Robert love him, but are strangers to his exuberances. Therefore even in his home he is alone with his excess of imagination....--and I have seen Eleanor stare at him with puzzled affection and he waggle his black patch at her and give a merry clerical whinny.[55]

Rymer's romantic attitude towards socialism and his stubborn pride in poverty are a form of an "inferior religion"--a fetish. The "black patch" in his clerical garments transfers itself to one of his eyes. Such is the sorry figure Lewis sees when he meets Rymer for the last time. He is bruised, he limps and he has also lost "two of the new set of Health teeth".[56] He has been beaten by Jack Cox, a rich farmer. He has lost his living. The crowds have testified that Rymer who never drinks was drunk. He is a personification of Lewis's theory that the common herd always opposes anyone who represents individuality.

It seems to me that since Lewis regards the eyes as the crown of human senses, the loss of an eye is symbolic. It is a punishment. In The Wild Body, the blind Ludo dies. The priest's adoption of the role of a poverty stricken Bishop's Fool, his romantic faith in socialism and his failure to come to grips objectively and realistically with the times in which he lives, brings him to this final humiliation: brutal beating at the hands of his own parishioners. Lewis sees Rymer in this pathetic condition. He is dressed in a suit. Without his crumbling clergyman's costume with the

black patch, he is without any of the attributes which he had imposed upon himself because of his "inferior religion"; consequently he is just a shell. He is a beaten-up wasted "wild body".

Lewis's view of people as automata cannot be and should not be interpreted as a vision of despair. He enjoyed thinking of the body as the machine. He mechanized human figures in his paintings. He identified with this concept. In Rotting Hill, however, the inheritors of the wild body are punctured shells, they lack the vitality and vigour of the machine-body. The machine has been invaded by corrosion; the body and the spirit that resides in it have been crumbled by rot. Death has occured. The wild body in Rotting Hill, now has become a mere hollow, rotten shell. But it has to be lived with for even if a man is treated as if he were a machine, Lewis says, "when a machine wears out you push it on to the scrapheap. When a man's body wears out there is still a man inside it".[57]

FOOTNOTES

Chapter One

[1]Eliot, "Wyndham Lewis--a memoir" Hudson Review. 170. "We have no critic of the contemporary world at once so fearless, so honest, so intelligent, and possessed of so brilliant a prose style."

[2]Kenner, Wyndham Lewis, 14.

[3]Tomlin, Wyndham Lewis, 11.

[4]Jameson, "Wyndham Lewis as Futurist", 295.

[5]Ibid., 329.

[6]Ibid., 295.

[7]Lewis, Rude Assignment, 113-4.

[8]Hastings Encyclopaedia, 393.

[9]Lewis, The Wild Body, 238.

[10]Lewis, "Studies in the Art of Laughter", 509.

[11]Ibid., 512.

[12]Lewis, The Wild Body, from the passage quoted from the Upanishads by Lewis, 243.

[13]Lewis, Enemy of the Stars, 46.

[14]Ibid., 51.

[15]Lewis, "Six Imaginary Letters", The Little Review Anthology, 113.

[16]Lewis, The Wild Body, 244.

[17]Ibid., 245-6.

[18]Lewis, Satire and Fiction, 48.

[19]Lewis, "Studies in the Art of Laughter", 510.

[20]Ibid., 511.

[21]Handley-Read, The Art of Wyndham Lewis, 52. Quoted by Eric Newton in his essay from Lewis's Wyndham Lewis the Artist: From Blast to Burlington House, 78.

[22]Pritchett, "The Eyeman", Books in General, 250.

[23]Lewis, The Apes of God, 470.

[24]Lewis, Satire and Fiction, 47.

[25]Wagner, Wyndham Lewis, 281.

[26]Materer, "The Short Stories of Wyndham Lewis", 617.

[27]Sypher, ed. Comedy, 179-80.

[28]Ibid., 97.

[29]Lewis, The Wild Body, 246-7.

[30]Lewis, "The Sea Mists of Winter", 396.

[31]In an article called"Wyndham Lewis: His Theory of Art and Communication", McLuhan has remarked, "His [Lewis's] theory of the comic...is the exact reverse of the Bergsonian theory of laughter...life is always serious for Bergson because our personal reality depends not on moments of detachment from the flux but on the moments when we are merged in it." Shenandoah, 84. Lewis's detachment is one more reason why he can never be called Bergsonian.

[32]Chapman, Wyndham Lewis: Fictions and Satires, 28.

[33]Lewis, The Wild Body, 232-3.

[34]Lewis, Unlucky for Pringle, 28-29.

[35]Lewis, Self-Condemned, 190.

[36]Lewis, Unlucky for Pringle, 163.

[37]Ibid., 128.

[38]Ibid., 206.

[39]Ibid., 206.

[40]Ibid., 221-2

[41]Handley-Read, The Art of Wyndham Lewis, 21

[42]Lewis, Unlucky for Pringle, 101.

[43]Lewis, The Art of Being Ruled, 12.

[44]Lewis, Unlucky for Pringle, 57.

[45]Lewis, The Art of Being Ruled, 11-12.

[46]Lewis, Men Without Art, 9.

Chapter Two

[1]Lewis, The Wild Body, vi.

[2]Ibid., vi.

[3]A version of "You Broke My Dream" appeared under the title "Will Eccles" in the first issue of The Tyro in 1921. "Sigismund" was first published in Arts and Letters in 1923.

[4]Lewis, Rude Assignment, 137.

[5]Lewis, The Wild Body, 232.

[6]Sypher, ed., Comedy, 79.

[7]Lewis, The Wild Body, 239.

[8]Ibid., 238.

[9]Ibid., 232.

[10]Ibid., 172-73.

[11]Ibid., 220.

[12]Lewis, Rude Assignment, 70.

[13]Lewis, The Wild Body, 4.

[14]Paulson, Fiction of Satire, 43.

[15]Lewis, The Wild Body, 5.

[16]Ibid., 4.

[17]Ibid., 5.

[18]Lewis, "Our Wild Body", 8.

[19]Symons, "The Novelist", Twentieth Century Verse, 122-3.

[20]Lewis, The Wild Body, 15-16

[21]Ibid., 21-22.

[22]Ibid., 24.

[23]Ibid., 27.

[24]Ibid., 29.

[25]Wagner, Wyndham Lewis, 288.

[26]Lewis, The Wild Body, 7.

[27]Ibid., 61-62.

[28]Ibid., 62-63.

[29]Ibid., 69.

[30]Lewis, The Lion and the Fox, 81.

[31]Lewis, The Wild Body, 69.

[32]Lewis, The Lion and the Fox, 187.

[33]"Freud explains everything by sex; I explain everything by laughter. So in these accounts of my adventures there is no sex interest at all." Lewis, The Wild Body, 6.

[34]Ibid., 90-91.

[35]Ibid., 92-93.

[36]Lewis, The Art of Being Ruled, 141

[37]Lewis, The Wild Body, 128.

[38]Ibid., 127-8.

[39]Ibid., 125-6

[40]Ibid., 135.

[41]Ibid., 135.

[42]Ibid., 137-8.

[43]Ibid., 139.

[44]Ibid., 145.

[45]Ibid., 153-4.

[46]Ibid., 9.

[47]Ibid., 158.

[48]Ibid., 160.

[49]Ibid., 164.

[50]Ibid., 165.

[51]Ibid., 179.

[52]Ibid., 179-80.

[53]Ibid., 180.

[54]Ibid., 187.

[55]Ibid., 189-90.

[56]Ibid., 191-2

[57]Ibid., 206.

[58]Ibid., 233.

[59]Ibid., 233.

[60]Lewis, The Art of Being Ruled, 290.

[61]Lewis, The Wild Body, 212.

[62]Ibid., 214.

[63]Ibid., 215-6.

[64]Ibid., 218.

[65]Ibid., 231.

[66]Ibid., 254.

[67]Ibid., 258.

[68]Ibid., 259-61.

[69]Ibid., 281.

[70]Ibid., 282.

[71]Ibid., 283.

Lewis often uses vegetable imagery along with references to rot while describing certain people. "A breed of mild pervasive cabbages has set up a wide and creeping rot in the West:" Tarr, 24.

[72]Ibid., 291.

[73]Ibid., 291-2.

[74]Ibid., 295.

[75]Ibid., 234.

Chapter Three

[1]Lewis, Rotting Hill, vii.

[2]Ibid., 296.

[3]Ibid., 298-9.

[4]Ross, ed. The Letters of Wyndham Lewis, 528.

[5]Ibid., 456.

[6]Ibid., 483.

[7]Lewis, Rude Assignment, 221.

[8]Lewis, Rotting Hill, 244.

[9]Harrison, The Reactionaries, 107.

[10]Lewis, Rotting Hill, 84.

[11]Ibid., x.

[12]Ibid., ix-x.

[13]Ibid., 90.

[14]Ibid., 90.

[15]Ibid., 31.

[16]Chapman, Wyndham Lewis, 142.

[17]Lewis, Rotting Hill, 93.

[18]Ibid., 90.

[19]Rose, ed. The Letters of Wyndham Lewis, 424.

[20]Lewis, Rotting Hill, see pages 96-109.

[21]Ibid., 98.

[22]Ibid., 95.

[23]Rose, ed. The Letters of Wyndham Lewis, 526.

[24]Lewis, Rotting Hill, 99.

[25]Ibid., 163.

[26]Ibid., 163-4.

[27]Ibid., 23.

[28]Ibid., ix.

[29]Ibid., 215.

[30]Ibid., 77.

[31]Ibid., 176.

[32]Ibid., 177.

[33]Ibid., 198.

[34]Ibid., 206.

[35]Ibid., 210.

[36]Ibid., 93.

[37]Ibid., 213.

[38]Ibid., 303.

[39]Ibid., 304.

[40]Ibid., 307.

[41]Ibid., 163.

[42]Ibid., 105.

[43]Lewis, The Art of Being Ruled, 168.

[44]Lewis, Rotting Hill, 51.

[45]Ibid., 108.

[46]Ibid., 77.

[47]Ibid., 95.

[48]Ibid., 93.

[49]Ibid., 255-6.

[50]Ibid., 260-1.

[51]Ibid., 156.

[52]Ibid., 155.

[53]Ibid., 155

[54]Ibid., 24-25.

[55]Ibid., 30.

[56]Ibid., 70.

[57]Ibid., 126.

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